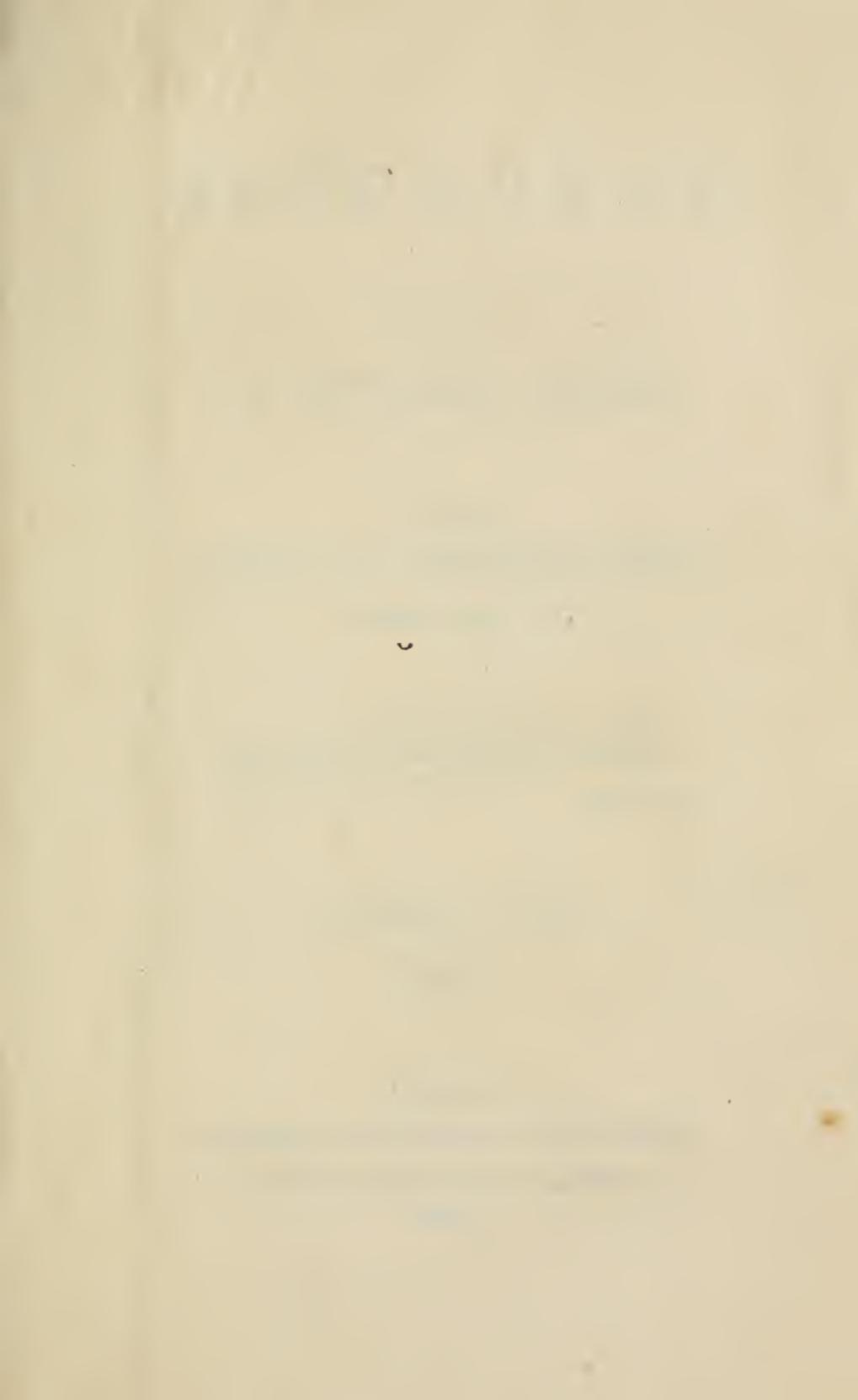


W. Tomkinson







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JANE LOMAX;

OR

A MOTHER'S CRIME.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "BRAMBLETYE HOUSE,"

"REUBEN APSLEY," &c.

—“Was 't not to make thee great,
That I have run, and still pursue, these ways,
That hale down curses on me?”

MASSINGER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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JANE LOMAX.

CHAPTER I.

"Surely we must be
Most strong in virtue, if we can give up,
After a life of dreary desolation,
All that we pined for in our earlier days—
A kindred spirit mingling with our own—
To fill the happiness of others' hearts."

HELEN, not wishing to disturb Rose Mayhew by communicating the recent conversation between her uncle and aunt, and their indignation at her intended marriage with Alfred Hunter, had been lost for some time in a profound reverie; when her cogitations were suddenly interrupted by the unceremonious entrance of Captain Bryant.

Vexed at this intrusion, and the more so as she immediately concluded that he came to pester her with unwelcome advice, or still less acceptable addresses, she was preparing to give him a somewhat uncourteous dismissal, when her anticipations and her anger were both dispersed by his exclaiming, with a cordial smile and a familiar nod, “What, Helen! and so you have had a regular set-to, yard arm and yard arm, with the governor and the old lady, and forced them to sheer off, have ye? I must n’t mutiny, you know, must n’t plot or cabal against my commanding officers; but hang me if I am not heartily glad you have made so good a choice of a husband, and have stuck to it like a brave girl; and if I can lend a hand in bringing you both into port, without flying in the face of the old folks, say but the word, tell me how I can serve you, and I’m your man.”

“Ten thousand thanks for your good wishes,

exclaimed Helen ; “ and, should I have occasion for your assistance, I will embrace your offer as frankly as it is made.”

“ You’re a noble-hearted, generous lass,” resumed the captain, “ for taking up poor Hunter, now that he is down in the world, and every body turning their backs upon him. I know him well, and though he is not fit for a wharf clerk — no more was I, for that matter—and carries his nose a little too high, I can vouch for his being as good and honourable a fellow as ever lived. He’s a gentleman, every inch of him ; I always had a real regard for the chap ; and he shan’t be turned adrift, though it be by my own father, without my throwing him out a rope.”

While Helen had been waging battle in defence of her lover, she had kept every feeling, except that of a momentary resentment, in perfect subjection ; but this cordial and unexpected testimony to his good qualities com-

pletely melted her heart, and deprived her of her self-possession.

The tears glistened in her eyes, and her voice trembled with emotion, as she faltered, “Words cannot tell you, Captain Bryant, how gratified I am by your favourable opinion of Mr. Hunter, how grateful I feel for your friendly offers. Your kindness is the more acceptable, because I had reason to believe that you came upon a much less agreeable errand.”

“What! — you thought I was coming to make love to you myself, I suppose. Ay, that’s what you girls are always expecting, just as if there was nothing else for a fellow to do. Well, so I should if I had followed mother’s advice, but I’m not such a fool. Too fond of the Charming Kitty to think of a wife just now ; and if I did, shouldn’t choose you, spite of your fortune. Beg pardon, always say what I think, but you are not one of my

sort. There's no accounting for tastes, you know."

"You need not apologise," said Helen; "and to prove to you that I am not offended at your frankness, I will ask one little favour, which has this moment occurred to me. If I am not mistaken, Mr. Hunter has, upon several occasions, been under obligation to you for pecuniary assistance?"

"Has he? well, perhaps he may. I had almost forgotten it; but I have no doubt he always repaid me punctually and honourably."

"In his present situation," resumed Helen, "his finance may need a little replenishment; and as there would be an indelicacy, perhaps an impropriety, in my offering to become his banker, you would much oblige me by conveying to him this hundred pound note, as if it were a temporary loan from yourself. It may spare some pains, both to Mr. Hunter's feelings

and my own, if you will lend yourself to this friendly deception."

"Bless your generous heart! Let me shake hands with you. I would go through fire and water to serve you, and hang me, if I do n't almost begin to envy Hunter his good luck. Give me the note—I will take it to him instantly, for I am anxious to shake hands with him, too, and congratulate him on his making so rich a prize."

Off went the good-natured captain, not, however, to execute his commission in strict accordance with his instructions, for, as he saw no reason whatever for concealing the source of the gift, and disdained to assume the smallest merit that did not belong to him, he resolved that Helen should have all the credit of her munificence.

The struggle of emotions by which Hunter had been overcome when he rushed from the presence of his mistress yielded to calmer and

more complacent feelings as he returned homewards.

“Thank Heaven ! it is over,” he mentally ejaculated. “I have done my duty—painful as it was ; the effort has been made, and my mind feels relieved. Rose, I am sure, will penetrate and approve my motives—will appreciate the sacrifice I have made. It is better, infinitely better, for both of us. We shall now be separated for life—gradually we shall forget one another. Forget!—forget Rose Mayhew ! Yes, I ought—I must—I will ! Henceforward all my thoughts shall be devoted to the happiness of the generous Helen. What a noble frankness in the confession of her regard for me, what winning condescension in giving me her hand ! Were I ever to forget her, I should be the most culpable as well as the most ungrateful of mortals.”

These reflections assumed a still more soothing tone as he drew near home, and

reflected on the present delight which his tidings would diffuse, as well as the long prospect of future tranquillity and enjoyment which would be opened to his family by his contemplated union.

Light was his step as he entered the parlour, and his heart yearned within him as, drawing them to his bosom, and tenderly embracing them, he exclaimed, “Mother! Harriet! this is the first happy moment I have experienced since our reverses. Never, no not for a single instant, have I been able to banish the tormenting thought that I was the author of all your sore trials, and of the deep sorrows which you in vain endeavoured to conceal from me. It is now in my power to make some atonement for the wrongs, the cruel, though unintentional, wrongs that I have done you. Our humiliating struggles with poverty and disappointment are about to cease. Helen Owen accepts me for her husband. This, my dearest Harriet, secures *your*

happiness, for Holloway's parents will now gladly consent to his marriage; and indeed I am inclined to think, from Helen's minute inquiries on the subject, and my knowledge of her character, that the generous girl, as soon as she possesses the power, will replace the portion of which you were so unfortunately deprived, and thus enable Holloway to become an immediate partner in the house of business."

Poor Harriet could only press her brother's hand to her heart, and weep her gratitude; while the mother, in a transport of tenderness and joy, laughed and cried by turns, utterly unable to decide upon what point she should begin her congratulations, or how give vent to the thoughts which crowded upon her in that ludicrous jumble of the trivial and the serious, the pertinent and the inapposite, which so often gave to her rambling discourse the semblance of a cross-reading.

“ Dear Helen, dear Alfred ! ” she exclaimed, “ you always were the best of sons—and such a great heiress, too ! Only to think ! — generous girl ! — I congratulate you, my dear boy ! Providence is very good to us, and I’m sure we ought to be grateful. May Heaven shower down its choicest — La ! how that tiresome donkey keeps braying at the Linseed Mills ! They say it’s a sign of rain, and I *do* think we *shall* have a shower soon, for my corns have been shooting all the morning.”

“ If my hopes be not disappointed,” said Hunter, “ and I am sure Helen will do her best to realize them, your future days, my dear mother, will be as happy and tranquil as your earlier life ; and henceforth we shall only look back upon our troubles and trials to be thankful that we have passed them.”

“ And perhaps, Alfred, we may find reason to be thankful that we have had them ; we shall all be the better for them, I dare say. And

shall we go back to live and die at dear Monkwell? The old house remains just as we left it, furniture and all, and it 's to be let for half its value. Dear, dear ! I do believe I should kiss the very doorposts, and weep for joy if I could again call it our's, for I love every chair and table it contains, and often think of the garden and the sundial, and the seat under the walnut-tree, till my very heart aches. It was your poor father's wish that we should never leave it. Heigho ! well do I remember when he was lying on his death-bed, and Pug was standing on a chair beside him, looking wistfully in his face ; he whined and stretched out his paw— that is, the dog did — and he turned to me and said in a faint voice, (your father, I mean) I 'm sure I think I hear him now as he exclaimed—Pug ! Pug ! you must n't pick that greasy bone on the carpet ; what will Mrs. Tibbs say ? take it from him, Harriet— Yes, your father, as I was telling you, said, ‘ I wish

you to remain as long as you can at Monkwell, and to keep on the same servants ; and as to the dumb beasts—' here his pains came on, and he never spoke distinctly again ; but I knew what he meant : he wished me to keep the dog and cat, as an emblem and memorial, like, of our long and happy union ; and so I will, please God ; and these plants, too, that were in his bed-room when he died. Welladay ! nobody knows how many tears I have shed upon their leaves, while trimming them of a morning, and thinking of the dear hand which used to do the same, and which is now—”

The involuntary twitching of her compressed lips prevented the completion of the sentence, and the poor widow sate with her eyes fixed upon the carpet, lost in the recollection of her past happiness, until the tears trickled unconsciously down her cheeks.

“ Every arrangement as to our future mode of life,” said the son, “ must, of course, depend

on Helen ; I know her to be fond of the country, and I see no reason to suppose that she would object to Monkwell as our permanent residence. How much *I* should be gratified by such a selection, it is needless for me to state, especially as we should then be within an easy distance of my friend Holloway and our dear Harriet—”

“ La ! so we should ! ” cried the mother, “ and we could drive over to see her as often as we liked, in — the sugar-basin, Harriet ! move it from the shelf — quick — quick ! do n’t you see Tabby is clawing at it ? — Dear, dear ! how glad I shall be to sit once more in the curtained pew of a Sunday, and to think that I shall be buried at last under the great yew tree, and lay my bones beside those of — Punch and Judy in the street again ! why they passed only an hour ago. Well, it *is* comical now, is n’t it, to see how cleverly they catch the cudgel when they toss it to one another ? ”

A new turn being given to her variable mind, the good lady, elated by the gladsome prospects now opening upon herself and her children, laughed and chirped without ceasing, during the remainder of the evening.

Harriet, whose immediate union with Holloway seemed to be now placed beyond the reach of accident, discarded for once her habitual pensiveness, and rivalled the exhilaration of her mother; while Hunter, sympathising in the cheerfulness of those who were so justly dear to him, congratulated himself on the sacrifice he had made, and enjoyed a complacency of mind to which he had long been a stranger.

CHAPTER II.

“ What find I here ? What demi-god
Hath come so near creation ? Moye these eyes ?
Or whether, riding on the balls of mine,
Seem they in motion ? ”

MERCHANT OF VENICE.

MARY LOMAX did not limit her sympathy to mere expressions of good will, cordial and sincere as they were, but took instant and active steps for overcoming all the difficulties that still stood in the way of her friend, and which Helen, consistently with a due regard to her own dignity, could not well have attempted to remove.

There would have been an indelicacy, under present circumstances, in her visiting Mrs.

Hunter, whose son, on the other hand, could not be received at Eagle Wharf. In this dilemma, Mary essentially befriended both parties. Mr. and Mrs. Lomax, willingly acceding to her request, frequently invited Helen and Hunter to dine and pass the day with them. Evelyn Barlow, as already stated, had become almost an inmate at Cypress House, and thus, during several weeks, the two lovers and their mistresses, enjoying long and frequent interviews, and daily more and more delighted with each other's society, gave themselves up to that entrancing interval of courtship, which a distinguished writer, himself a married man, has pronounced to be the best honeymoon.

In the brief snatches of friendly intercourse allowed by this seclusion, Helen marked with deep regret a distressing change in the deportment and character of Rose, who now confined herself to her own room with a rigour that almost amounted to imprisonment. She

was often abstracted and in tears ; and, when tenderly questioned as to the cause of her sorrow, would take offence, and reply with a petulant captiousness quite at variance with her usual demeanour. Such was her irritability that the smallest contradiction or disappointment excited her temper to vehemence and weeping.

Unsettled both in body and mind, she could neither remain long in one place, nor pursue her customary occupations, except at short and broken intervals. Fretful, impatient, and unhappy, she shunned even the society of Helen, betaking herself to solitude, and exhibiting an air of mysteriousness and reserve in all her movements. And yet so changeful were her moods, that she would sometimes throw herself into the arms of her friend, embrace her with a passionate fondness, supplicate pardon for her peevishness and estrangement, and chat with her in all the

endearing frankness of their former confidence.

Respecting while she regretted this capricious turn in her friend, Helen seldom intruded into her room, especially when she found that she had begun to secure its inviolability by locking herself in. On one occasion, however, having some communication to make relative to her approaching marriage, she proceeded to her apartment, and, finding the door ajar, passed into it.

Rose was not there, but her drawing materials, not yet put away, showed that she had just been pursuing her favourite amusement. What was the astonishment of Helen, as she approached the table, to see lying on it a miniature of Hunter, the likeness perfect, and the painting of the most finished and exquisite description ! Thrilling with surprise and pleasure, for she instantly concluded that it was intended as a marriage present for herself, she

was hanging over and admiring the picture, when Rose re-entered the apartment, and had no sooner caught sight of Helen, than with flashing eyes and kindling cheeks she ran up to her, snatched the miniature rudely from her hand, and exclaimed in an angry and almost menacing voice : — “ How dare you pry into my secrets ? How dare you intrude into my room ? ”

“ Dare ! ” repeated Helen, not less amazed than hurt at the agitation and vehemence of her friend. “ If I am an unwelcome visitant, I will immediately withdraw ; but, before I do so, allow me to assure you that I had not the remotest intention of prying into your secrets, or intruding upon your privacy.”

At this remark, uttered in a tone of calm displeasure, Rose, recollecting as quickly as she had forgotten herself, sank upon a chair, shook her locks over her downcast eyes, clasped her hands imploringly together, and stammered

out :—“ Pardon, pardon—dear, dearest Helen, forgive me ! I had intended, I had thought—but, overcome at seeing you here — the surprise ——.”

“ Enough, enough,” interposed Helen, affectionately pressing her uplifted hands :—“ I now see and understand it all. You had intended this beautiful miniature as a little surprise for me, a wedding present, perchance ; and the disappointment of having your secret prematurely detected put you for the moment into a pet. Am I right in my conjecture ?”

Incapable of asserting an untruth, the confused girl evaded a direct reply by exclaiming :—“ Bear with me, I beseech you ; pity and forgive me. In sooth, I cannot account for my own unbridled petulance. Would you believe that at the instant I could scarcely refrain from striking you ? I fear you will no longer love me ; and I almost begin to hate myself, for I am become ever peevish and irritable, and

occasionally, as you have just witnessed, almost ungovernable. I sometimes fear I shall go mad."

" My own, my darling Rose !" cried Helen, repeating her embrace ; " do you imagine that you can be less dear to me in sickness than in health ? This irritability, and the unusual and exquisite keenness of your senses, which others, as well as myself, have lately noticed, are but so many evidences of disease. Your mind sympathizes with the morbid state of your health, and I look forward with pleasure to a change of air and of scene as the best remedies for your complaint."

" I had just finished—I hope you will accept it," said the still agitated Rose, who seemed not to have listened to what her friend had been remarking.

" Are you speaking of the miniature ? I accept it with delight, and shall ever value it as a memorial of your friendship. But, in the

name of wonder, my dear little enchantress, how did you manage to paint it? and without my knowledge, too! When and where did he sit to you? Did you smuggle him into the house? did you render him invisible to all eyes but your own bright orbs, or did you summon one of the Genii, and bid him whisk you through the air to the abode of Mrs. Hunter? There must have been sorcery or magic of *some sort.*"

"I have never seen him since he left the Wharf," hesitated Rose, hiding her blushes beneath her pendent tresses. "I painted it entirely from memory."

"What! this vivid likeness, this most speaking and animated portraiture, not only of his features, but of the mind and character stamped upon his intelligent countenance, have you delineated all these from memory alone? Astonishing! and almost as fearful as it is amazing, for I see in this preternatural acute-

ness of your faculties, a new proof of a disordered system. Why, why will you thus obstinately refuse to see a physician?"

"I need no better physician than yourself. You have just been prescribing change of air and of scene, and I shall very shortly follow your advice."

This was said in an emphatic tone, and with a significant air, which her friend did not immediately notice, for her eye had again fallen upon the painting, over which she hung, scrutinizing its minutest touches with an increasing wonderment and delight.

"So, then, it was for this," she exclaimed, "that you immured yourself so often and so long in your own room; it was for my gratification that you forsook all your ordinary pursuits, and ran the risk of still further injuring your health, already so delicate and precarious. Dear girl! how shall I ever repay you for a kindness so considerate and devoted!"

Poor Rose, who had, in truth, painted the miniature for herself, and who felt, therefore, that she neither deserved the gratitude nor the caresses lavished upon her, shrunk from them without daring to confess the reason of her repugnance, further than by pleading a bad headache.

"It has, doubtless, been occasioned by your stooping so long over your painting," said Helen; "and, since you say it is now quite finished, I will secure you against any increase of your malady, by bearing off its cause."

So saying, she kissed and again repeatedly thanked her for her most acceptable present, and left the apartment, carrying the miniature with her.

Hunter, whose pride disinclined him to ask a favour of any sort, and who felt that, in the pending marriage, he had nothing whatever to offer in return for all the manifold advantages he would derive from it, shrank with a sensi-

tive delicacy from any attempt to influence the decisions of Helen as to their future mode of life.

In one of their confidential colloquies, however, it seemed as if she had penetrated the wishes of himself and his mother; for she turned the conversation to the subject of Monkwell, their former residence; and gracefully appearing to ask, while she was conferring a favour, inquired whether he would object, since she herself had a decided repugnance to a London life, to take up his abode once more in the ancient dwelling-place of his family.

“Nothing could be more delightful to me,” eagerly exclaimed Hunter; “and, if I have hitherto refrained from alluding to this subject, it was solely in the fear that I might be putting a constraint upon inclinations which I wish in every respect to study and to follow.”

“To succeed in that object, you must be frank in every thing, and state your desires as

unreservedly as I do mine. At this very moment I come to you as a petitioner, and I shall prefer my suit like a bold and sturdy beggar. You do not pique yourself, I believe, upon your skill as a frugal manager ; I myself am utterly unversed in all the mysteries of housekeeping ; under such auspices our fortune, competent as it is, might prove insufficient to secure us against embarrassment. An utter stranger, besides, at Monkwell, I shall feel as if I had dropped from the clouds, and shall sigh for some elderly *chaperone* to introduce me to the many families in the neighbourhood with whom you are acquainted. Now, what a comfort it would be to me, what an advantage to both of us, if dear Mrs. Hunter would come and live with us, and not only undertake those domestic duties, which I am so little qualified to perform, but enact the friendly part of my guide, companion, and monitress, in the manner I have pointed out."

“ A thousand thanks, my generous Helen ! ” cried Hunter, snatching her hand and pressing it to his lips :—“ You have anticipated the wish that was of all others the dearest to my heart. Most deeply do I feel your delicate kindness ! I only fear that, if you thus heap favours upon me, I shall become as bankrupt in gratitude as I am in fortune.”

“ Then, let it not be considered as a favour at all ; it was not so intended ; and, since we are both of us too proud to be under obligation to one another, our domestic arrangements shall assume the more independent form of compromise and exchange. Thus Alfred Hunter, on the one part, nominates his mother as a perpetual resident and inmate at Monkwell ; and Helen Owen, on the other hand, claims the same privilege for her friend, Rose Mayhew.”

“ Rose Mayhew ! ” ejaculated Hunter, colouring deeply, and starting with surprise.

“ Yes, Rose Mayhew. It is an old agree-

ment between us that whichever married first should receive the other as a companion in her house.”

“Rose Mayhew!” reiterated Hunter, scarcely conscious of what he was uttering.

“Ay; is there any thing so Gorgon-like in the image conjured up to you by the mention of her name, that you should look thus confounded and amazed?”

“Oh no, no, no!” cried Hunter, endeavouring to collect himself; “quite the contrary; she is every thing that is—an inmate—a resident, did you say?”

“Yes; I would wish her to be considered as belonging to our family, not less than your mother.”

“Your wishes, dear Helen, must, of course, be mine; but this arrangement is so strange, so unexpected, so ——, does it not strike you that there will be something very awkward, very objectionable, in having ——.”

His embarrassment prevented the completion of the sentence, to which, however, Helen promptly answered by exclaiming :— “ Awkward ! objectionable ! what, in having as a dweller among us the bewitching Rose Mayhew ? You amaze me. I really do not understand you. I should have thought that you would have been delighted at the proposition, instead of conjuring up difficulties where none whatever exist.”

“ I have no right to object to any thing ; I merely ventured to suggest—I was only apprehensive that ——.”

“ Fiddle-faddle ! I will not have you apprehend any thing but pleasure and gratification from the society of so charming, so gifted, a creature. She is utterly without fortune, or protectors ; so that, on her account, not less than on my own, I must faithfully adhere to our agreement. Allow me to add that it would be ingratitude on your part, were you, upon this occasion,

to entertain a thought that would interfere with it, for you possess not in the whole world a friend more true, more cordial, more zealous, and more persevering, than Rose Mayhew."

"I believe it, I believe it," cried Hunter, deeply affected; "but I know not how I have merited her regard."

"Oh, with what energy has she fought your battles!" continued Helen, kindling into fervour, as she sang the praises of her friend:—
"With what an impassioned eloquence did she extenuate your frailties, and vindicate you against every evil report! I know not whether my declaration will give her any additional title to your gratitude; but I can truly declare that I should never have consented to bestow myself upon you, but for the active interference and the almost incessant persuasions of Rose Mayhew."

Hiding his face in his hands, in order to conceal as much as possible the vehement

struggle of his feelings, Hunter could only ejaculate, "Noble—generous — magnanimous girl! God bless her!" Helen fortunately commenced a new eulogy of her *protégée*, which, affording him time to recover himself, he exclaimed, when she was again silent, "I have but one question to ask. Is Miss Mayhew a party to this arrangement?"

"I have never formally mentioned the subject to her, because I have always taken it for granted that she would adhere to our contract. Upon this point we will have an immediate explanation, though I cannot for a moment doubt that she will gladly perform her share of our engagement."

"If it be your wish and her's, I repeat that it must, of course, be mine also," said Hunter, who, in order to break off a conversation which was becoming every moment more painful and agitating to his feelings, pleaded an engagement, and hurried from the room.

“This is marvellous,” thought Helen to herself, when he had left her, “and not less disagreeable than strange. It is manifest, palpable, glaring, that he has some objection to Rose, which he hesitates to state; that he totally disapproves of my plan for domesticating her at Monkwell; and, though he has consented to it, has yielded with a woful bad grace. For some time past, indeed, I have noticed that he has cautiously shunned her society, and that she has equally avoided, unless when called upon to defend him, all mention of his name. Can he have quarrelled with her, can he have any personal objection —? Impossible! one might as well object to an angel. I have heard of men who could not bear a rival, even of her own sex, in the affections of their wife. This must be the secret reason of the difficulties which he could not distinctly define, or which, as is more likely, he was ashamed to state. Hunter, I fear, has a spice of jealousy

in his disposition, and, as this failing is the result of a too sensitive and engrossing love, I ought not to judge it harshly. Neither ought I to yield to it too submissively. My compact with Rose shall be faithfully executed, and Hunter shall find that my attachment to my friend, fervent as it is, will never interfere with the more sacred and tender claims of the husband. The same sense of duty that makes me firm upon this point, will render me obedient to him upon every other."

As this subject was now paramount in her mind, Helen took the first opportunity of sounding the intentions of her friend, by stating the arrangement she had made relative to her future residence at Monkwell, and expressing a hope that it would prove agreeable to the wishes, and beneficial to the health, of Rose.

"My best, my dearest, my only friend!" exclaimed the latter, pressing Helen's hand to

her heart, and endeavouring to smile through her tears :—“ I told you in a late conversation that I would take your advice, that I would seek a change of air and of scene, for the benefit of my declining health. I have done so, but it is not to Monkwell that I am about to remove. No, Helen, I feel that I have a grave, a sacred duty, to perform to you, to myself, to — to —to another. The day of your marriage must be the day of our separation : we must part—the very word almost chokes me, but nothing —.”

“ Separate — part !” ejaculated Helen in a tone of profound amazement ; “ I do not understand you. Are you serious ?”

“ Do not interrupt me, I beseech you,” resumed Rose ; “ and, when you have heard my statement, spare me, for pity’s sake, spare me all appeal against a resolution which has been deliberately formed, and in which I shall inflexibly persevere, because it has been dictated

by my conscience and a solemn sense of duty. You will remind me, I know, of what you have termed the compact between us. It was no agreement upon my part. Often as it was urged by you, I never gave assent to it, except by my silence. For the generosity, the kindness, the forethought, that suggested it, I was duly grateful ; but I would never bind myself to an engagement, of which it was easy to anticipate that many circumstances might prevent the performance. This contingency has arisen. Ask not my reasons, question not my motives ; I must not, cannot, will not, be interrogated. Suffice it to state, once for all, that they are imperative and insuperable."

Not less hurt than surprised, Helen gazed inquiringly upon the countenance of her friend. Its expression of deep distress, mixed with an inexorable pertinacity of purpose, deterred her from disobeying her injunctions, especially

when she recalled the irritability to which her friend had latterly been subject.

She contented herself, therefore, with saying :—"I was not prepared for this, dear Rose, and I need not declare what a heart-shock it has occasioned me. Whatever most conduces to your own happiness and comfort must be most desired by me ; but, that I may be the better reconciled to your decision, that I may be the better assured of its tending towards your future respectability and welfare, may I be allowed to ask what future plan of life you have chalked out for yourself?"

"Upon this subject I have no reserves whatever. Discard all doubts, all apprehensions, dear Helen, upon my account. Already have I taken the preliminary measures that are to secure my future maintenance, by advertising for a situation in the country, as companion to an elderly lady, and already have I several applications, upon the respective eligibility of

which I shall gladly consult you, now that you are aware of my intentions."

"Companion!" exclaimed Helen. "My poor dear Rose! this will never, never, never do. Your delicate health, your exquisitely sensitive mind, utterly disqualify you for such an employment. Have you considered what it is to be the nurse rather than the companion of a sickly peevish old lady, whose inferiority to yourself, in every thing but fortune, will make you the more bitterly feel the sense of your dependence: who will render you the confident of her revolting maladies, and the recipient of all her whims and ill-humours; who, because you are not a servant, will expect you to discharge those functions that a menial would refuse; to be answerable for the health of her cat, to wash her lap-dog, to minister to the wants of a screaming perroquet, and to clean out the cages of half-a-dozen canary-birds?"

“ But every lady in want of a domestic inmate does not necessarily keep such a menagerie as you have been describing, nor is it indispensable that she herself should be a testy, capricious, and querulous invalid.”

“ In that case, she will need no other companion than her own healthy mood and happy thoughts. As none but the halt and the infirm require a crutch, so you may depend upon it, dear Rose, that none but the mental cripple will advertise for a human walking-stick.”

“ You are supposing an extreme and improbable case, and one to which, even were I doomed to experience it, I should be under no necessity of submitting longer than it suited my convenience. In fact, Helen, you are proving too much ; you object to every thing that I propose. My mind, I tell you, is made up — firmly, definitively, irrevocably. I must not, cannot, will not, be thwarted.”

The mood of the speaker became changed,

her wan cheek reddened, her eye sparkled, she began to talk with an energy that almost amounted to exasperation, and rapidly paced the room in a state of excitement, which her friend, knowing its morbid source, could only pity and lament.

“ Well, my sweet Rose !” she exclaimed in a soothing tone ; “ you shall try this plan, since you have made up your mind to it, but only as an experiment, and upon the condition that, when you are tired of it, which, if I am any thing of a prophetess, will soon occur, you shall return to one whose house, whose arms, whose heart, will ever be open to receive you. Even now my very soul is sick at the thought of our separation.”

“ And do you think that I am at this moment lying upon roses ?” asked her friend in a mournful accent. “ I say nothing of my own sufferings, for I would not needlessly distress you, and I am silent about the long debt of

gratitude I owe you, not only because words would be utterly unavailing to express it, but because I am endeavouring to evince it in the most effectual manner, by tearing myself away from you."

"This I cannot pretend to decipher, dear Rose, nor do I understand you better when you talk of gratitude, since I feel, by the very fear of losing it, how much my happiness has depended on your society. Our pursuits, our pleasures, our little sorrows and disappointments, have for some years been almost identical. We have been more than sisters ; never, never, as I fervently hope, shall we be less than friends, for, however the tide of life may separate us for the moment, I feel persuaded that the yearnings of our hearts will soon bring us together again. During the progress of your experiment, for I consider it as nothing else, I shall be cheered by this hope, as well as by the trust that your health will be benefited by

a change of air and scene. In this I shall have the greater confidence, if you will faithfully promise me, during your short exile, to consult some eminent physician.”

“ Yes, yes,” cried Rose, with a sudden air of significant animation, “ this I can, I do promise you. I hope soon to see one who is the most eminent of his tribe, one who has never failed to effect a cure, however inveterate the disease—one who has no sooner placed his finger on your pulse, than his friendly magic not only heals all the maladies that flesh is heir to, but all the sickness of the soul — one who needs not to be consulted a second time, for his patients suffer no relapse, and, being once cured, are cured for ever.”

“ Indeed !” exclaimed Helen, incredulously. “ And who may he be, this marvellous practitioner? I should like to consult him myself.”

“ O no—no—no. I hope not—I hope not,” cried Rose ; “ for his name is —— Death !”

And so saying, she glided out of the room, her eyes flaring, and her pale features lighted up with a look of wild exultation, that shot a pang of sudden anguish and alarm to the heart of her friend.

CHAPTER III.

“Full oft we see
Cold wisdom waiting on superfluous folly.”
ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

HELEN, who had determined to remain under the protection of Mr. Bryant until she came of age, was by no means sorry to receive the congratulations of her friends on the arrival of that important period ; for many circumstances had latterly combined to render her abode at Eagle Wharf more than usually disagreeable. Although both her uncle and her aunt had given over all attempts to dissuade her from her obstinate and wilful self-sacrifice, as they termed her approaching marriage, they carried on a

covert attack against it by a succession of sneers and inuendoes, in which none but coarse and vulgar minds, irritated by disappointment, would have indulged. Their conversation, rarely directed *to* Helen, but generally levelled *at* her, was “full of wise saws and modern instances,” touching the unhappy fate of such indiscreet young heiresses as had spurned the admonitions of their friends, and thrown themselves away upon profligate fortune-hunters.

Sometimes the worthy couple would dilate, with an excusable parental pride, on the happiness and wealth, which with them were convertible terms, reserved for the fortunate woman who should be selected for a wife by their son Ambrose, against whom, nevertheless, they would occasionally launch a sharp reproach for his omitting to secure the prize which they had been so carefully enriching for his caption, and had placed so purposely within his reach.

Whether or not Jacob Bryant, keen man of

business as he was, would have proved himself so diligent and so successful a manager of his ward's property, unless he had all along imagined that he was catering for the future wife of his own son, we cannot determine ; but certain it is that Helen herself was surprised at the unexpected accumulation of her fortune during her minority.

On the day following her twenty-first birthday, her guardian placed in her hands an account current, which did infinite credit, not only to his own financial skill and trustworthiness, but to the calligraphy of John Hoggens, the new clerk. He himself carefully read it over to her, explaining every item with a technical precision not always intelligible to his auditress, and, after having received from her a written acknowledgment of its accuracy, which she delivered with an expression of the most heartfelt gratitude for his good stewardship ; he accompanied her to the Bank, where

he transferred into her name, and made her enter her acceptance of it in the books, a large amount of stock which, at the price of the day, came to the exact fractional balance that was due to her.

All the way back to the Wharf was devoted to an exceedingly well meant, but equally tedious, lecture on the difficulty of acquiring, and the facility of dissipating, a fortune, coupled with the most earnest advice that in the marriage settlements the whole should be strictly tied up, so as to protect it from the extravagance or perilous speculations of her husband.

Helen was neither covetous nor purse-proud, and it was precisely on that very account that she was highly gratified at finding herself so much richer than she had expected, since her money would enable her, without sensibly encroaching on her own income, to replace Harriet's marriage portion, a design she had for some time past entertained ; while the resi-

due was more than sufficient to support a handsome establishment at Monkwell, and to restore to the name and family of Hunter the full consideration it had formerly enjoyed in the neighbourhood. To mark her gratitude to Mr. Bryant, she presented to him four massive silver dishes, a present the more acceptable and opportune because the annual dinner to his brethren of the Fishmongers' Company was now approaching.

In conformity with the anxious wish of Mrs. Hunter, who had set her whole heart upon the measure, it was determined that the triple marriages of Helen with her son, of Holloway with her daughter, and of Mary Lomax with Barlow, should be solemnized at the same time, and in the same church.

Some little delay intervened from Holloway's inability to leave his business in the country ; but the nuptial day had at length been fixed by all parties, and the reader must imagine

the bustle, preparation, and anxiety, that now agitated the inmates of Eagle Wharf, of Cypress House, and of the lodgings of Mrs. Hunter, whose incessant locomotion, whose ludicrous cross-purposes, and concurrent fits of laughing and crying, might have easily persuaded a stranger that she was mad with joy.

To add to the busy interest of the moment, Evelyn's father was immediately about to launch a large East Indiaman from his dock below Blackwall, a circumstance which he deemed of scarcely less importance than the marriage of his son.

Of the ceremonies and festivities usually attendant upon a launch few can be fully aware, unless they happen to have resided in the vicinity where such scenes are displayed. For some time the whole neighbourhood had been engaged in hiring boats, and making arrangements to witness the spectacle ; and, as sight-seeing and amusements were now the order of

the day with the happy and bustling Mrs. Hunter, she proposed that a party should be formed to sail or row down to Blackwall, and, after having seen the launch, to seek some pleasant spot on the banks of the river, where they might land, and partake of a *pic-nic* dinner.

Her proposal was carried by acclamation, and orders were given for preparing the handsome pleasure-boat in which Benjamin Lomax had been accustomed to take his little excursions on the water. Much to his regret, his increasing malady, which had latterly confined him to his room, would not allow him to accompany his friends. Barlow's parents could not absent themselves from the dock, especially as they were to have a large dinner-party and a ball at night; the Bryants had a boat of their own, wherein the portly wife, fine as a lady mayoress, took her station, with her pursy husband by her side, while their servant, in a flaming new livery, was squeezed into the stern; Lomax,

who had not yet recovered from the agony of terror excited by the reported return to Europe of Edward Ruddock, dreaded publicity of all sorts, and refused to pass beyond the walls of Cypress House.

Holloway had not yet arrived in London. The party, therefore, which was to be chaperoned by Mrs. Hunter, consisted of her son and daughter, Barlow and Mary Lomax, Helen and her friend Rose. The latter had for some time resisted every solicitation to join the excursion ; but a secret curiosity to witness the deportment of Hunter as the betrothed husband of Helen, the yearnings of an affection which was by no means extinguished, and the desire to enjoy, possibly for the last time, the society of the two beings who were dearest to her upon earth, so far silenced the objections of her better judgment, that she at length consented to the wishes of her friend.

One other individual contrived, unwelcome

as he was to most of them, to intrude himself into the party, and by his presence produced results equally important and unexpected. No sooner was the excursion proposed, than Jasper Pike, who affected a juvenile delight in all parties of pleasure, but who, on this occasion, was in reality attracted by the prospect of seeing the launch, and partaking of the subsequent feast at Mr. Barlow's without paying for boat-hire, begged to be included, offering to act as steersman, for which office he had qualified himself, by his frequent trips in a friend's boat, to eat white bait at Greenwich.

His proposal was received with an expressive silence, which the speaker, who was by no means easily repulsed, construed into a general acquiescence, and immediately began, with his usual flippant and importunate forwardness, to lay down the whole plan of proceeding for the day. The discovery that the dinner was to be a *pic-nic*, to which he would be expected to

contribute," threw him all aback, but it was now too late to recede ; and, making a virtue of necessity, he liberally offered to supply the bread, declaring that he had known several dinners entirely spoilt by the omission of this indispensable article. Mary and Helen, detecting the meanness of his motive in this selection, interchanged smiles sufficiently significant to be observed by Pike, who had the grace to add that he had merely mentioned that particular article because he could procure it from a baker in his neighbourhood of a quality superior to any other in London.

Every thing on the morning of the launch wore a gay, exhilarating, and auspicious aspect. It was that delightful season of the year when the spring is just ripening into summer ; the morning sun threw a golden bloom over the waters in the direction of Blackwall, where an eastern breeze had cleared the atmosphere, so that the innumerable boats gliding along the

river, and the successive tiers of shipping, many of them decorated with flags in honour of the occasion, were brightly and distinctly visible. Rolling slowly and majestically across a forest of masts, the congregated vapours still hung over all the westward portion of the city; assuming a roseate tinge from the beams of the sun, and imparting, to the shrouded metropolis, as widely scattered towers, domes, and steeples, gradually emerged from the dense mass, a mysterious vastness and grandeur which stimulated the imagination, and elevated the whole scene into sublimity.

When they arrived at the place of rendezvous, Mrs. Hunter and her party found Pike waiting for them, with a large basket hanging on his arm, containing, as they inferred from its bulk, a plentiful supply of the bread which was to form his contribution. This he carefully deposited in the stern of the boat, and then, with a brisk, dapper air, meant to be particularly

youthful, and a smart vulgarity which he mis-took for politeness, tendered his assistance to the ladies, and bustled about the stowage of the hampers and hand-baskets laden with the other materials of their dinner.

In a short time all was arranged, the company took their seats, and the boat floated off, two watermen plying the oars, for the state of the wind did not allow them to hoist sail, a circumstance not a little consolatory to the timid Pike, who sat bolt upright in the stern, the basket between his feet, the tiller strings in either hand, while he looked sharply out to the right and left, in search of any approaching danger.

Boats of all sorts, many of them adorned with awnings and gay streamers, floated rapidly down the stream, the faces within lighted up with pleasant anticipation, while the banks on either side resounded to cheerful voices, merry greetings, and vivacious laughter.

The party whose histories we are narrating formed a partial exception to the general hilarity. There is a deep and heartfelt happiness, which, by awakening sentiments of devout gratitude to Heaven, partakes much more of a serious than a lively character. Such were the present feelings of our lovers, who were sobered by the approaching change in their mode of life, and the prospect of the felicity that awaited them.

Other and less grateful thoughts deepened the pensiveness of Hunter. He had not seen Rose for some time, and the deteriorated health expressed by her looks, combined with her manifest dejection, filled him with a sadness not altogether unmixed with self-reproach. Well might she wear a desponding aspect, poor girl! for she was mentally contrasting the happiness that surrounded her, with her own forlorn and desolate plight, with the wretchedness of her own disappointed and withered heart.

Of the countless throngs that gave gaiety to the river, every individual possessed either parents, relatives, or friends. She herself had no parent, no relative, and, with the solitary exception of Helen, from whom she was shortly about to part, perhaps for ever — she had no friend. Unprotected and unguided, she was to be thrown upon the wide world to fill an equivocal and dependent station, which could hardly fail to expose her to many mortifications, while it might not improbably subject her to trials and dangers which she hardly dared to contemplate, because she felt herself peculiarly unfitted to struggle with them. How little such reflections were calculated to raise her spirits, was evinced by her mournful silence, her downcast eyes, and her abstracted air.

Pike endeavoured to conceal his own apprehensions, from which he was never entirely free, by singing snatches of nautical songs, and

affecting a pert vivacity, while the benevolent Mrs. Hunter, her face beaming with complacency, and exclamations of wonder and pleasure for ever upon her lips, simpered, and laughed, and talked cross-readings for all the rest of the party.

The watermen repeatedly requested Pike not to hug the shore, but to steer the boat into the middle of the river, that they might have the full benefit of the tide, which was favourable.

“ My good friends,” replied the bachelor, who could not even affect to think of any body but himself, “ I never throw away a chance. *You* can doubtless swim—I cannot ; so that, in case of a capsize, we should not start fair. Upon occasions of this sort, you must be well aware that every lubber who can hire a craft pushes it into the middle of the stream, whether or not he can handle an oar or manage a sail. See how they are all huddled together, and how

easily some of them might run us down ! Why should we rush into danger ? ”

“ Danger ! ” echoed one of the boatmen, with a slight expression of contempt, “ where ’s the danger to come from ? ” And he then whispered to his comrade, “ I say, Tom, a shy bird that, ar’n’t he ? Never on the water afore, I reckon, though he handles the tiller so knowingly. He seems to be one o’ them chaps that may run ye aground, but won’t never run ye into any other scrape.”

Little did the utterer of this averment dream that it was so speedily to be disproved. The fatality which almost invariably threw Pike into the very midst of peril from his over-anxiety to avoid it, was about to be alarmingly signalized.

Opposite Limehouse, a collier was hauling out of the tier, when the slackening rope broke, and, the tide swinging her rapidly round, her bowsprit was carried athwart the course of

the pleasure-boat, so as to threaten her mast. With common presence of mind and promptitude of hand, Pike might have steered clear of the coming danger; but he had no sooner perceived its approach, than, abandoning the tiller rope, he hastily dived into the basket beneath his feet, whence he snatched a patent life-preserver, his invariable companion on all water excursions, and hastily threw it over his head. While struggling into it, in an agony of terror, the mast struck the collier's bowsprit, and a faint cry announced that the shock had thrown Rose into the water. Aroused from his deep reverie by the sound of her well known voice, Hunter was no sooner aware of the catastrophe, than he plunged headlong after her, exclaiming, "Rose! my beloved Rose! save her! save her!"

Assisting the action of the tide by the violence with which he sprang from the side of the tottering boat, it instantly capsized, and

the whole party, amid the loud screams of the females, were precipitated into the water. A crowd of boats hurried instantaneously to their assistance, and Helen, almost as soon as she had been immersed in the waves, found herself snatched from them, and sitting in a wherry, the people of which, in answer to her terrified inquiries, bade her be under no alarm for her friends, the whole of whom had been already rescued, without any other injury than a momentary struggle with the waters. Having received full assurance upon this point from a variety of witnesses, she earnestly entreated her rescuers to convey her immediately back to Eagle Wharf, a request which was met with the kindest and most prompt compliance.

Just as they had put about for this purpose, a four-oared boat pulled alongside, on the seat of which Helen beheld her friend Rose reclining in an apparently unconscious state, while Hunter hung over her, almost distracted with

alarm, pressing her hand to his lips and to his heart, and wildly ejaculating, “ Rose, my long, my secretly beloved Rose ! speak to me, for God’s sake ! I shall go mad if I have rescued thee too late. Oh hear me, and give some signs of life, thou best, thou dearest, thou sole object of my affections ! ”

As if revived by the sound of his voice, the party thus passionately addressed opened her eyes, cast a bewildered look around her, and then, faintly exclaiming, “ O Mr. Hunter, dear Mr. Hunter, is it you who have saved me ? ” sunk blushing into his arms, and was pressed in an ecstacy to his bosom.

At this juncture, some intervening boats shut them out from sight ; but Helen had already seen and heard enough — too much ! The whole scene swam indistinctly before her eyes ; hollow murmurs rang in her ears ; a sudden sickness of the heart oppressed her ; and she fainted. When Helen recovered her

consciousness, she found herself lying in her own bed at Eagle Wharf, and Mrs. Bryant sitting by her side.

CHAPTER IV.

"———What! gone without a word?
Ay, so true love should do; it cannot speak,
For truth hath better deeds than words to grace it."

SHAKSPEARE.

EVELYN BARLOW, naturally singling out his beloved Mary as the first object of his solicitude, supported her without much difficulty, for he was an expert swimmer, until they were taken up by one of the numerous small craft that thronged to their assistance. Mrs. Hunter and Harriet, after clinging together in some little peril, were rescued by another party. The watermen held on to the capsized boat, until some of their comrades came to their assistance; and thus have we satisfactorily accounted

for the whole of the party, excepting Pike, who, far from being so fortunate as his companions, remained for several minutes struggling in the water, and had, at last, a very narrow escape for his life.

Terrified with the apprehensions that some of the females might cling to him, and thus destroy the efficacy of his life-preserved, it was his first care to strike out away from the rest, towards some vessels moored at a little distance. He succeeded in reaching them, but, instead of being enabled to clamber up their steep sides as he had anticipated, he only displaced the machine, which had been imperfectly adjusted at first, so that, when he again committed himself to the stream, the apparatus slipped along his body, and became entangled with his feet, which its buoyancy immediately raised above the surface of the river, while his head and body sunk beneath it. In this most perilous predicament, he floated with the stream,

unable, of course, to call for assistance, or to draw attention to his drowning state in any other way than by the rapid motion of his imprisoned feet. For some moments he escaped notice, the general anxiety being directed towards the females, so that he was almost at the last gasp, when the curiosity of a boatman being excited by the phenomenon of a pair of half boots, sole upwards, beating a sort of devil's tattoo in the air, he rowed up to the mysterious object, and, having righted the unlucky bachelor, hauled him, more dead than alive, into his wherry.

Instead of seeking to know whether the rest of the party were saved, Pike's first inquiry, when he recovered his senses, related to the extent of his own loss, an investigation of which the result was by no means satisfactory. His watch had slipped from his fob into the mud, to be wound up, perchance, by some lucky ballast-dredger ; and his ungrateful money, though

he loved it better than any thing in the world, had seized the same opportunity for eloping. Dreading the further expenses that would inevitably be entailed, should he suffer himself to be put to bed at the inn to which he had been conveyed, he bargained with a hackney coachman to carry him immediately home, exulting in the notion that he had thus avoided being taken in by an extortionate innkeeper, or a designing apothecary.

In his anxiety, however, not to be overreached by others, he had, as usual, overreached himself. By riding back to the Temple in his wet clothes, he brought on so severe an illness, that he was confined to his room for six weeks, and had to pay fifteen pounds for advice and medicines—rather a dear bargain for *not* seeing a launch, and nearly losing his life by a life-preserver.

We return to Helen, the perturbation of whose mind, when she was left alone to recall

the startling occurrences of the day, it would be utterly impossible to describe. At first, all was a bewildering and frightful chaos, a species of waking nightmare, in which every thing appeared horrible and revolting, but nothing true. It seemed too strange, too hideous, too impossible, to be real. But, as this wildering confusion passed away, and the actual events of the morning successively recurred to her, until the whole truth flashed with an electrical effect upon her memory, a whirlwind of conflicting emotions lacerated her mind, and convulsed her entire frame.

Inflamed, almost to momentary madness, by the feeling that she had been deceived, betrayed, and outraged — that a base conspiracy had been formed against her, in which the treacherous Hunter, and the still more perfidious Rose, were accomplices — that its unexpected detection, and the sudden breaking off of her marriage, on which she had instantly

resolved, would expose her to the insulting ridicule, or still more humiliating pity, of the world—she gave way, in the anguish of her soul, to an indignant exasperation that found a fierce comfort in the thought of wreaking some signal vengeance upon the culprits.

This storm of passion, the natural ebullition of a quick temperament, under a sense of unmerited and intolerable wrong, gradually subsided. Her heart shook off the unworthy assailants by which it had been overcome and tortured; her better judgment and kindlier feelings recovered their ascendancy; the film fell from before her eyes; and she was enabled not only to trace the course of recent events with a clear and undistorted vision, but to do tardy, though full, justice to the motives of the friends whom she had so hastily and unsparingly condemned.

The thronging reflections awakened by this retrospect plunged her into a deep reverie of

several minutes' continuance, at the conclusion of which her spirit softened into tenderness and truth ; and the tears, which had hitherto been denied a vent, flowed unconsciously down her cheeks, as she exclaimed in a subdued and broken voice :

“ I see it all—I see it all—I see it all ! They loved one another from the very first — what could be more natural, more excusable ?— and their mutual estrangement was but an effort to conquer an unhappy passion, of which their deep and hopeless poverty forbade the indulgence. Hence the coldness, the struggles, the indecision of Hunter ; hence the waning health, the deep despondency, and the morbid captiousness of Rose. Deluded, blind, besotted being that I was, not to see all this before ! And now that my eyes are torn open, what thousands of glaring proofs spring up on every side ! Not to me, as my fond vanity believed, not to me but to Rose did he direct his pas-

sionate apostrophe, when inebriety drew forth the real feelings of his heart, and he addressed her as the long and secretly beloved idol of his affections. Long and secretly beloved ! Why these were the very terms, the identical phrase, that he used this morning as he hung over her in the boat, and pressed — Oh ! dolt and idiot that I have been not sooner to—

“ And Rose’s fit, when I told her that I had accepted Hunter —that even this should not have given me a suspicion ! Incredible infatuation ! And the miniature, too, which the poor girl was doubtless painting for herself to console her love-lorn heart ; and the confusion and objections of both parties, so inexplicable at the time, when I proposed that Rose should come and live with us at Monkwell : all this is now clear, intelligible, palpable. Oh ! how have I been duped and stupefied by a love which could see nothing but what it wished ! ”

As Helen sate up in the bed, the unheeded tears still falling upon her clasped hands, she was for some time again lost in a deep and silent reverie, at the conclusion of which she resumed in a firmer tone of voice—

“Methinks I am now gifted with a keener penetration than usual, as some compensation for my past obtuseness ; for, if I mistake not, I can dive into the hearts of Hunter and of Rose, and explain their every action. For the happiness of his mother, of his sister Harriet, and even of Rose herself, he resolved to conquer his inauspicious attachment, and to offer his hand to one who never—who never—”

A returning gush of feeling prevented the completion of the sentence, and she fell back upon the bed, sobbing and weeping like a child. Presently, however, she recovered sufficient composure to continue.

“And Rose, who had discovered the state of my affections, as, indeed, she often told

me, magnanimously determined to sacrifice herself, and to go forth into exile and bondage for the happiness of her friend. She was not wrong, when she so mournfully anticipated her early death, for I know how fragile is her hold of life, and I am now confident that the struggle would have been fatal to her. This must not and shall not be. Generous Hunter ! my sweet, my darling, my high-souled Rose ! ye were made for one another ; and not upon my account, now that I have at length detected your mutual devotement, not upon my account, I solemnly swear, shall ye make misery and shipwreck of your whole future lives. Well do I foresee the extent of the martyrdom that awaits me ; I must give up finally and for ever — yes, I must sever myself permanently from Hunter, from Rose, from Mary Lomax. Suddenly and violently must I be wrenched away from all that I love' ; my bleeding heart must be torn up by the roots ; but I shall, at all events,

have the consolation of knowing that I have done my duty, and that, in this dreadful trial, I have acted in a manner worthy of myself, and of the dear, dear friends from whom my hard fate compels me to part for ever."

An opportunity was now presented for realizing the lofty aspirations of her bosom ; and the thought how she should most becomingly take advantage of it, so as fully to meet her own benevolent wishes, and to convert the sneers or pretended compassion of the world into a genuine admiration, supplied the only balm of which her lacerated feelings were for the moment susceptible. To her own temporary sufferings she became partially reconciled by the conviction that they would secure permanent felicity to Hunter, to his sister, and to Rose. At all times, the practice of virtue is the best solace for the afflicted ; by bestowing blessings upon others, we entail them on ourselves, a fact which was never more strikingly

exemplified than in the present experience of Helen, who passed the whole night, sleeplessly indeed, but not without complacency in arranging the scheme of beneficence, and the plan of action, to which she had already made up her mind.

Horton, the female servant who had lived with her since her girlish days, was an elderly widow, of acquirements much superior to her station, of an approved discretion, and devotedly attached to her young mistress, as well from gratitude for many favours, as from a long experience of her perfect amiability. This person Helen summoned to her room in the morning, and desired her to procure a glass coach for their immediate conveyance into the City. In vain did the good woman enlarge upon the imprudence of quitting the house, on the day after her perilous immersion in the water.

Declaring, as was indeed true, that she did

not suffer the smallest inconvenience from the accident, Helen peremptorily insisted upon being obeyed, and at an early hour proceeded accordingly to Mr. Bryant's stockbroker, who accompanied her to the Bank, where she transacted the business she had intended, and then returned to Eagle Wharf. How she was occupied during the remainder of that day, which was passed in the seclusion of her own room, will appear by the following letters :

“ My dear, dear Rose !

“ Knowing the acute, the exquisite, sensibility of your feelings, and the delicate state of your frame, wasted as it has been by a withering concealment and blighted affections, I almost tremble to think of the effect which may have been produced upon you by the shock and the disclosures of yesterday. Let me begin, therefore, by the tranquillizing assurance that, after having discovered your secret, and obtained a perfect clue to every thing which

had before appeared mysterious in your recent conduct, I love you ten thousand times more than ever. Respect, reverence, I had almost said adoration, are added to my regard, when I recall the magnanimous sacrifice which you were about to make for my sake.

“ After this declaration, it may seem inconsistent to say that I pardon you for all that you have done ; and yet surely there is much, very much, that calls for forgiveness, notwithstanding the purity of your motives. Your generous, your disinterested, your high-souled, friendship, has nearly plunged us into a dilemma wherein the life-long happiness of one, perhaps of both, must inevitably have been lost. O Rose ! Rose ! knowing yourself to be secretly idolized by Mr. Hunter, and loving him not less tenderly in return, a fact which is now made palpable to me by manifold confirmations, how could you suffer me to be deluded into the belief that I was the sole

object of his affections ; how could you urge a marriage which might have been attended with not less cruel disappointment to my heart and hope than to your own ? Yet why should I ask you ?

“ I know the exalted quality of your mind, the intense ardour of your friendship, and that knowledge solves every difficulty. Were you to inquire of me how I became so inconceivably blinded as not to perceive the real state of your affections, I should be utterly unable to furnish you a reply. These questions, however, need not now be mooted. Enough to know that we have all stood upon the edge of a precipice, and that we should all most devoutly thank Heaven, as I do from the very bottom of my soul, for enabling us to discover the danger before we were precipitated into the abyss.

“ Let us not look to the past, which offers so little on which we could wish to dwell, but to the future, where happier days, as I trust

and believe, are in store for us all. The events of yesterday have condensed into a few hours the sum and substance of a life. My projected marriage with Mr. Hunter, is, of course, dissolved for ever ; I have formally released him from all his engagements, and from this moment *you* are to fill the place which I so lately occupied.

“Methinks I see your start of confusion, as you reach this passage of my letter, but I have advanced nothing that is not strictly and literally true. Henceforth you are engaged to him, you are his betrothed, his affianced wife. In the presence of other witnesses besides myself, did he passionately address you as the beloved of his soul ; in the same presence did you call him your dear Mr. Hunter, and sink blushing into his arms. Not to wound your feelings, Heaven knows, do I repeat this, but to remind you that you have accepted him, and to prevent all future embarrassment and delay in the ac-

complishment of a marriage which would doubtless have occurred at an earlier period, had it not been prevented by one insuperable impediment.

"That obstacle is now removed. I have this morning transferred into your name a sum, which, by securing to you a moderate independence, while it will not raise you and your future husband above the motives to future exertion, will place you, according to my notions, in the most enviable situation that society affords. In the false position lately occupied by Mr. Hunter, his great and varied talents were rather a bane than an advantage to him. Be it your care, dear Rose, by directing them into a more honourable and appropriate channel, to realize your own prognostications, when you so strenuously maintained that all his infirmities, whether of temper or of conduct, were the sole result of the uncongenial element to which he was condemned.

“ And now, my dear friend, after having been so diffuse about the affairs of yourself and your future husband, let me say a few words respecting myself. Scruple not to accept my gift ; nay, do not even imagine that it lays you under any particular obligation, for how could I better employ a portion of my property, than in securing the happiness of the beings whom on earth I most esteem ? Let it accomplish its object, and I am repaid with usury. More, much more, than enough is left for myself. My fortune proves larger than I had anticipated. I am moderate in my desires, and you have often heard me maintain that all beyond competency is care. Do you remember the saying of the wise man, I forget whom, which we used to read at school ?—Content is natural wealth ; luxurious wealth is artificial poverty.

“ When you receive this letter, I shall be travelling from London to a remote part of

England. Where I shall ultimately settle, I have not yet decided; but, whithersoever I may wander, I shall be accompanied by the faithful Horton, who is fully competent to discharge the double functions of my protectress and my companion.

“That I shall suffer at first in being torn away so rudely from you, from Mary Lomax, and from others whom I tenderly regard, I will not affect to deny; but my spirits, as you have sometimes experienced to your cost, are buoyant almost to exuberance, and I felt this morning, while signing my name at the Bank, a lightness and elasticity of heart, which I accepted as an augury of the happiness I hope permanently to enjoy, when I shall have had time to recover from the shock of recent occurrences.

“The hardest, the most cruel, the most heart-rending word of all remains to be written. We must part, dear, dear Rose, part to meet

no more!! In the necessity of this decision, you will instantly acquiesce, since you, yourself, when our respective positions with reference to Mr. Hunter were exactly reversed, found yourself imperatively bound to adopt a similar course. Grant me but one favour, the only one I shall ever ask at your hands. Seek not, in any respect, to alter my resolves ; they have been deeply considered ; they are immutable. Seek not to pry into the place of my retreat ; let us have the fortitude to begin where we must finish, by accustoming ourselves to an absolute and total separation. Hereafter I may, perhaps, write to you, but, even upon this point, I am undetermined. As yet I have had no time to reflect, or to arrange my ulterior plans. It will be my study to do whatever may seem best for our mutual happiness and peace of mind.

“ For both our sakes, I have torn myself away without the keen and unnecessary pang

of a parting interview. With my pen, therefore, my sweetest of sweet friends! my dear little Mimosa! my darling *Rose de Meaux*! (Oh! how delightful is it to call you once more by those endearing nick-names of our girlish days!) with my pen must I bid you adieu, and ejaculate Bless you, bless you, bless you a thousand times! That you may be quickly restored to health, and to the enjoyment of enduring felicity with the chosen of your affections, will be the constant prayer of your ever fond and affectionate, though ever separated friend,

“HELEN OWEN.”

Under the influence of highly-excited feelings, which, in writing to one who possessed her entire confidence, she dreamt not of qualifying in the expression, this letter had been dashed off without a pause or hesitation. That to Hunter, of which we subjoin a copy, though

shorter, was composed with greater difficulty, for she already experienced the reserve inspired by her totally altered situation. She was not now addressing her intended husband, but one whom she was henceforth to consider as a comparative stranger.

“ MY DEAR FRIEND !

“ For such I will still call you, though any nearer and more tender appellation must for ever be abandoned, let us congratulate one another on our providential escape, not only from the waters in which we were immersed, but from an inauspicious union which might have entailed irremediable misery upon ourselves, and upon another whom we both love still better than ourselves. Ceaseless be our thanks to Heaven for this double rescue !

“ I was by your side yesterday, and heard every syllable of your impassioned address to

Rose, when you hung over her in the boat. That agonizing moment drew up the curtain of the past, and revealed to me all the stages of a mutual passion, my blindness to which seems to me at present little less than a miracle. The secret which had been so honourably locked up in your respective hearts, is divulged to each other, to me, to the world. You are fondly enamoured of Rose, she has bestowed her entire heart upon you.

“ You will be naturally distressed, perhaps terrified, at the thought of the pain and humiliation which this discovery must have occasioned me ; and I hasten, therefore, to relieve your apprehensions. Freely do I confess that for a moment my woman’s pride was shocked beyond endurance, my self-love unspeakably wounded, my heart tortured to its very core. For a brief space, I believe I was actually mad ; but the soul-convulsing spasm passed rapidly away, my vision was cleared in the struggle,

and instantly I saw every thing that had occurred in its true colours.

“ Fully do I now comprehend your motives for putting a double violence upon your affections by avoiding a marriage with Rose, and seeking it with me. Sincerely honouring you for this meditated sacrifice, and, believing that you would have strictly and conscientiously discharged the vows made at the altar, it is needless to add that I freely, cordially, forgive you for all the pain which you may unintentionally have occasioned me. I release you from every engagement, every promise. Judge how completely I consider myself absolved in return, when I apprise you that, ere you can peruse this letter, I shall have left London, never to return, never to see you again !

“ But I do not release you from a single tie that bears reference to our precious Rose. You love her, and are beloved in return ; how

fondly let her shattered health and deep melancholy attest. Your long-continued unconscious courtship has been eloquent in its silence, and, though passive, it has penetrated deeply into your hearts. What need, then, of delay?

“The poverty of Rose no longer presents a barrier to your union. She now possesses a competency, which, though moderate, will enable you to marry her without imprudence ; and it cannot, surely, be difficult to enlarge your income, when you give a proper direction to the great abilities with which you are gifted. May I be allowed to suggest that no sphere seems to me more appropriate to your talents and feelings, while none can be more delightful and independent, than the field of literature ?

“Indulge me with a few more words about our dear Rose. You do not, you cannot, know her half so well as I do. This gifted creature

requires a delicacy of treatment, proportioned to the acuteness of her intellect and feelings. She has no parents, no relations ; her oldest friend will be far, far away ; she will have nobody in the wide world on whom to depend but yourself. You will possess all her thoughts, all her affections, her whole undivided heart, and oh, *what* a heart ! Should you prove unworthy of this most precious charge, she will not long survive so withering a blight of all her hopes. Should you fondly reciprocate her love, oh how ineffable will be your mutual felicity !

“ In calling upon God to bless your approaching union, I adjure you to recollect the alternative that is placed before you, and to pursue the right path. You *will* do so ; I know, I feel that you will, for the sake of Rose, of yourself, and of her who, whithersoever she may be borne by the severing tides of fate, can never, never forget those whom

she never more shall see, nor ever cease to subscribe herself Mr. Hunter's

“ Sincere well-wisher and friend,
“ HELEN OWEN.”

Her letter to Hunter's sister was short, but not less honourable to her high and generous feelings than the foregoing. It ran as follows.

“ MY DEAR HARRIET,

“ Circumstances, which I need not detail, for you will quickly be apprized of them by others, have suddenly though amicably dissevered my marriage contract with your brother. We part to meet no more. But *your* nuptials, thank Heaven ! need not for a moment be interrupted. I am well aware that Mr. Holloway's friends only consented to the match in the belief that Alfred would soon be enabled to replace your portion. It had always been my intention to realize his wishes, and the enclosed receipt for stock transferred into your

name will show that I have not been unmindful of my obligation.. From its trifling amount, I can discharge this debt of honour without the smallest inconvenience to myself.

“ Farewell ! May you be as happy in your coming union as you deserve to be ! I cannot invoke for you a more abundant blessing. Present my adieu, and my most cordial regards and congratulations, to Mr. Holloway, and to your excellent mother ; and, believe me, my dear Harriet, when I assure you that, though we may never meet again, I shall not the less be

“ truly and affectionately your’s,

“ HELEN OWEN.”

One more struggle remained for the writer of these letters. She had intended to see her friend Mary Lomax, to explain to her the motives of her conduct, and to embrace her once more before she left London. But she felt quite unequal to the task.

While she had been devising her plans during the past sleepless night, while she had been carrying them into effect at the Bank, and subsequently writing to her friends, her mind had been kept in a state of tension, which gave her a temporary support. But, when this strong excitement failed, her overwrought spirit sank into exhaustion, she felt utterly unnerved and unstrung, and the tears again flowed from her eyes, without her possessing the power, or even the wish, to restrain them.

Recoiling from the idea of exposing her weakness to Mary, she contented herself with penning a few lines, containing a promise of full and unreserved explanations when she should have reached the end of her journey. A short letter, with a similar declaration, was also written to Mr. and Mrs. Bryant.

Soon after daylight on the following morning, Helen, accompanied by Horton, was posting

along the great western road. Never did she again see her friend Rose! Never did she again see Alfred Hunter!

CHAPTER V.

"Oh ! 't is not, Hinda, in the power
Of Fancy's most terrific touch
To paint thy pangs in that dread hour—
Thy silent agony — 't was such
As those who feel can paint too well,
But none e'er felt, and lived to tell!"

MOORE.

MRS. LOMAX lived so perpetually in the presence of her beloved son, in whom all her earthly hopes were concentrated, that his gradually declining health was less perceptible to herself than to others. Like Helen Owen, she was destined to experience that there is nothing so blinding as our wishes ; she knew, she felt, that her whole happiness depended upon his recovery ; and the very thought of a disappoint-

ment was so withering to her heart, so utterly intolerable, that she drove it from her with loathing and abhorrence.

A doting mother is ever sanguine ; and many circumstances combined to feed the expectations of Mrs. Lomax, which were never destined to be realized. The treacherous nature of her son's complaint, for he was now in the last stage of a rapid decline, was more especially calculated to delude her into the belief that he was rather recovering from his disease than sinking under it. The hectic flush, that insidious banner which death plants upon the cheek of his intended victim, to mark him for his own ; the glary brilliancy of the eye, the expiring gleam of a sun that is about to set in the darkness of night ; the preternatural acuteness of the intellect, a proof that the spirit is prematurely developing itself, until it has “ o'er-informed its tenement of clay ;” all these symptoms of disease were to the fond

parent incontestable evidences of convalescence.

A medical pretender, whose confident predictions of effecting a cure had induced her to employ him, and whose total ignorance of the complaint, or sordid determination to keep so profitable a patient in his hands, prompted him to maintain his bold assertions, helped to confirm her in her delusion.

But that which most effectually lulled her apprehensions was the demeanour of Benjamin himself, who, although his weakness increased, was totally free from suffering of any sort, while his spirits were never depressed. In this latter circumstance, however, the filial affection of the youth had contributed to deceive her. Without imagining himself to be in any imminent danger, a secret presentiment, and those undefinable sensations which can only be felt, not described, awoke occasional misgiving as to his ultimate recovery. Of death he had

no fear whatever ; but, the thought of leaving his parents and his sister so far overcame his gentle and loving heart, that, when left alone, which was but for brief intervals, he would sometimes sink into despondency, and shed involuntary tears.

Conscious, however, that his mother's happiness, if not her existence, was wrapped up in his own, he would not for the world have suffered her to witness his dejection. Whenever his quick ear caught the sound of her approach, he hastily washed his eyes, received her with his wonted smile, sweet as that of an angel, and, in order to gladden her soul with allusions to his recovery, talked cheerfully of different excursions which he had projected when his amended health should allow him to travel.

Wishing, upon one occasion, to confirm the impression of his returning strength, by walking for some time up and down the room, his

debilitated frame sank under the effort, and he fell into a fainting fit of such long continuance, that his agonized mother, imagining him to be dead, sate by his side in a stupor of transfixed horror, which was succeeded by a delirium of joy, when animation returned, and he once more opened his pearly, dove-like eyes.

As distrustful now as she had previously been sanguine, she sent instantly for the most eminent practitioner in London, who, after having minutely examined all the symptoms of his patient, and conversed with him for some time, took Mrs. Lomax aside, and, feelingly deplored the painful duty he was called upon to discharge, gradually broke to her the intelligence that her son was in a rapid consumption, which might allow him to live for some weeks, but from which he saw no chance whatever of ultimate recovery.

“What!” exclaimed the horror-stricken parent, clasping her hands together, and

starting suddenly from her chair. “ O God ! you do not mean to say that my darling Benjamin will die—that there is no hope ! ”

“ While there is life, madam, there is always hope ; but, in this instance, I consider it so extremely slight, that I must again entreat you to be prepared for a fatal termination.”

“ Never — never ! I cannot, will not, be prepared for my dear boy’s death,” screamed Mrs. Lomax ; and, throwing herself upon her knees, while she raised up her clasped hands, she passionately exclaimed :— “ Oh save him, for God’s sake, save him ! We are rich ; you shall have half our fortune ; nay, all, all, all ! I will give you every thing ; my very life — only do not — for pity’s sake, do not say that my Benjamin, my only boy, my only treasure upon earth—must die ! ”

“ To Heaven and not to me belongs this kneeling attitude,” said the physician, as he gently raised her up. “ Address your prayers

to God, that he may assist my efforts, which shall be unremitting. Never have I seen a youth who appeared to me so perfectly seraphic, both in beauty and disposition ; never have I seen a patient who in one single interview has awakened so powerful an interest in my heart. I will attend him as if he were my own child ; you must second my skill and exertions by becoming his nurse ; and, in order that you may effectually discharge the duties of that office, allow me to tell you that you must begin by moderating, nay, by totally suppressing, these transports of unavailing grief."

"I am calm—composed—serene," cried the mother, crushing down her violent grief by a sort of convulsive effort :—"I will be his slave by night and by day. Neither sleep nor refreshment shall I need while I am thus watching over him. Only give me instructions, and see how submissive, how abject, I will become !

What am I to do? How am I to act? Tell me, only tell me."

"Let me entreat you once more to govern your impatience. Your dear boy, *our* dear boy, as I may most truly term him, must not be flurried or agitated, still less must he be distressed by witnessing the grief of a parent with whose impassioned affection he cannot fail to sympathize. You must carefully conceal your anxiety; this is my first and most earnest injunction. Such other directions as may appear expedient, I will write down for your guidance."

From this hour, Mrs. Lomax became the nurse, companion, and comforter of the invalid, whose room she hardly ever quitted, administering all his medicines with her own hand, supplying every want, and anticipating every wish, with the tenderness, solicitude, and fore-thought, which none but a fond mother can feel and exercise.

And thus passed several weeks, during which there was an incessant though secret contest of love between the parent and the son, the latter fearing to make any allusion to his death, which he now felt to be surely approaching, from fear of distressing his mother, and ever wearing an affectionate smile in her presence, while his heart was sinking within him at the thought of their coming separation, and of the dark despair into which his decease might plunge her. She, on the other hand, though she marked with an indescribable anguish a daily change, which too visibly confirmed the prognostications of the physician, quelled the throbbing agony that almost threatened to burst her bosom, and subdued her features to a composure, which she could sometimes even wrench into a smile.

During this anxious interval, the day arrived which had been fixed for the triple nuptials. Those of Helen and Hunter were never to be

celebrated ; the marriage of Mary and Barlow, as will easily be anticipated, was obliged to be postponed, on account of the critical and alarming state of Benjamin. His affectionate sister, sharing with her mother the duty of attending upon him, which she discharged with an equal tenderness and sedulity, would not suffer any considerations of self to interfere with these paramount claims.

Indeed, the shock she had experienced from the announcement of his imminent danger, occurring at the same time with the sudden and trying separation from her friend Helen, whose recent generosity had rendered her infinitely more dear than ever, proved so depressing to her spirits, that she would have formed but a sad and heart-stricken bride, had the ceremony taken place at the period originally intended. Her lover, however, sympathizing with her sorrows, and respecting her high sense of duty, was so far from wishing to hold her to

her engagement, in point of time, that he instantly assented to the deferment of his happiness, until the fate of Benjamin should have been decided.

None of these imperative grounds for delay applied to the union of Harriet and Holloway, the latter of whom, having obtained a temporary leave of absence from business, for his wedding excursion, had travelled up to London to claim his bride. That marriage was, therefore, solemnized on the appointed day. Neither the circumstances nor the wishes of the parties calling for any parade on the occasion, we have little to record, save that the bustling and kind-hearted Mrs. Hunter, disappointed as she was that her son's intended union with Helen had been so unexpectedly marred, seemed at the wedding of Harriet to be half crazy with joy; while her grief and her tears were equally uncontrollable, when she was obliged to bid her daughter adieu.

An invitation, however, to visit the newly-married couple, on their return home, and the anticipation of being thus enabled to run over to Monkwell, and explore the scenes of her past happiness, so rapidly restored her equanimity, that she exclaimed with a simpering complacency, as the post-chaise bore them from her door:—"Joy go with you? joy go with you! What a nice chaise, and what capital horses! Well, I do think they are the prettiest pair I ever saw—that is, Harriet and Holloway. La! there's one of them kicking! That's right, postboy, flog them well: I hope they're not vicious; but don't hurt them, poor creatures!—the horses, I mean. God bless them, and grant that they may be comforts and companions to me in my old age, and sit by my bed-side, and close my eyes when I die. La! only to think of my seeing dear Monkwell again! and the grave where my poor husband lies buried! Ah! I shall never, never forget the throb that

my heart gave, when they first began to toll the bell at his funeral. Why, there's the muffin-man's bell, I do declare, and not yet six o'clock! Where's Sally? We ought to make merry on dear Harriet's wedding-day, and so we 'll have some muffins for tea."

Without any material alteration in the symptoms, Benjamin continued to sink under a painless and gradual declension. The invalid himself was the first to make allusion to a subject which had long engrossed the attention of all, but which all had feared to broach. Conscious that his death was now rapidly approaching, and, dreading the effect it might produce upon his friends, and more especially upon his mother, should she be unprepared for the blow, he determined to communicate to her the certainty of the coming event, and, if possible, to reconcile her to it by anticipation.

Taking, therefore, and tenderly pressing the hand of either parent in his own, as they sate

by his bed-side, and, looking with an affectionate smile at his sister, he exclaimed in a voice whose gentle tones were now more silvery and dulcet than ever:—“ Father ! mother ! Mary ! The fear of distressing you has induced me to lock up a secret in my heart, which ought, perhaps, to have been sooner revealed. The time is come when I can be no longer silent, lest my lips should be closed for ever ; and, if I give you pain now, it is only that you may be the less distressed hereafter. Bear my tidings with as much fortitude as I impart them, and do not, I entreat, I implore you, do not lacerate my feelings by the display of an unavailing grief, when I tell you that I must shortly die ! Yes, I have long felt the hand of death upon my heart. No cares, no love, no skill, can save me. My few days are numbered. Soon, I know not how soon, we must part for ever ; and it is my earnest supplication, my solemn prayer, that you will

be as perfectly resigned to this painful severance as —— as I am.”

His voice, which had been previously firm, though soft and low, trembled a little at these last words, and he paused as if to recover and collect himself. Long as they must have been prepared for the event thus announced, the countenances of his auditors betrayed a mixture of surprise and embarrassment, with the deepest mental anguish ; but his emphatic adjuration prevented any ebullition, and they compelled themselves to silence.

Mary, though not less deeply affected than her parents, retained much more command over her feelings, quelling, as well as she could, every manifestation that might distress her brother. At first, she was afraid to trust her voice, but, having in some degree recovered her firmness, she returned the beaming smile of the invalid, and exclaimed, with an assumed calmness : “ Dearest Benjamin ! let us hope that you may be

mistaken in your prognostic, which may prove, after all, to be nothing more than the dark forebodings that often accompany sickness. Let us hope that our cares and good offices, and the undoubted and unrivalled skill of your kind physician, may still preserve you to be a blessing to us all.”

Benjamin shook his head with a faint smile.

“ Well, then,” resumed the sister, “ we have still a hope, still a heart-healing solace, left to us. Our separation, however painful, will only be a short one. We shall again meet to part no more—we shall meet in heaven, where sickness and sorrow are unknown.”

“ Ay, ay,” joyfully exclaimed the youth, upturning his celestial eyes, while his whole countenance became irradiated with a pious fervour. “ That, indeed, *is* a glorious solace; we shall meet in heaven ! ”

Mrs. Lomax raised herself suddenly up, and

exchanged a rapid but significant and agonising look with her husband. Abashed, heartstricken, appalled, the guilty pair instantly read each other's thoughts. *They* had no chance of heaven ; outcasts and reprobates, they were cut off, by their unrepented and unatoned crime, from all the promises of divine favour ; instead of sharing the hopes of their son, their souls were darkened with despair. When once he was withdrawn from their embraces, never, never should they again behold their darling Benjamin.

As these promptings of remorse rushed across the mind of Lomax, he groaned deeply, turned his wandering, haggard, eyes towards the door, and walked out of the room with a look of anguish and dismay. Mary immediately followed him, for she saw by his disturbed mood that he was not fit to be trusted alone ; while the partner of his guilt, as if apprehensive that her countenance might betray what

was passing within, hid her face in the bed-clothes.

“ Dearest mother ! ” said Benjamin, “ I was not prepared for this ; I had trusted that you would be more calm, more reconciled to the will of Heaven. Nay, I had hoped that you would not only have been submissive, but grateful, for, oh ! with how much tenderness, with how much mercy, has this inevitable dispensation been accompanied ! Neither in mind nor body have I sustained a moment’s suffering. I am dying, it is true, but I feel it not. Rather might it seem that I am floating away smoothly, serenely, pleasantly, into another and more glorious sphere of existence. At this very instant, I am elated by an indescribable buoyancy of spirit, as if my soul were spreading its wings, and I were about to commence my flight, without one backward look, one yearning regret, one earth-clinging thought, to the realms of bliss.”

“ May God forgive me if I am wrong,” said the afflicted mother, resuming some degree of composure ; “ but methinks there is an aggravation mingled with the very solace to which you have made allusion. Suffering, and sorrow, the waning frame and the ravages of age, reconcile us to a separation even from the dearest objects of our love, by converting the dart of death into a welcome instrument of release. But, to lose you thus, dear Benjamin, in all the bloom of youth and beauty, to have you snatched away just as you are rising up into a manhood which would have been the comfort, the honour, the glory, of our old age—this, this indeed is hard to bear ! It is as if my heart were to be suddenly torn up by the roots, and wrenched from out my bosom.”

“ And yet who shall say, dear mother, that this decree of Providence may not be a blessing ? I know that we are all fallible creatures, liable to temptation ; and, had I lived, I might,

perhaps, by falling into some deadly sin, have been a disgrace and a curse to you in your old age, instead of a comfort and an honour."

"Never, dear Benjamin, never ! It is not in your nature. You would only have lived to shed a richer glory and happiness over our house. But this delight, this earthly redemption to our souls, is to be denied us. Besotted that we were to expect it ! Had we but looked at you, but listened to you, we ought not to have dreamed of any such beatitude. No ; you are too good, too beautiful, to remain long among us. In form, face, mind, every thing, you are a ready-made seraph, and Heaven is but reclaiming its own. With such a glorious destiny before you, well may you rejoice to quit this melancholy world."

"I do *not* rejoice to quit it, dear mother, although I am perfectly resigned to my fate ; nor can I by any means deem this cheerful and

beautiful earth a melancholy world. What a beneficent miracle is it to be called out of the blank darkness of nothing, to be formed in God's own image ; to be placed in this sun-lighted and sky-roofed palace, to be endowed with faculties and perceptions that qualify us for the enjoyment of the most exquisite delights, both sensual and intellectual ; and, above all, to inherit the hopes of future immortality in a higher and more glorious state of being ! Oh ! what sublime, what soul-exalting privileges are these ! Who, then, shall call this a melancholy world ? ”

“ They who have dashed from the hand of the Deity his proffered cup of happiness and salvation ! ” groaned Mrs. Lomax, in a voice of solemn anguish. “ The guilty, though undetected, wretches, who have secretly violated the laws of God and man ; the weak and wicked creatures who, like Esau, have sold their birth-right for a mess of pottage. Oh horrible ! most horrible ! ”

" Well may you groan, dear mother, and be perturbed in spirit at the thought of such besotted sinners as have sacrificed the next world, and won nothing but misery in this. Let us be thankful that we have escaped this moral suicide ; let us guard against the possibility of its occurrence, by flying from temptation. *I* shall be soon beyond its reach—but I would fain indulge the hope that *I* may still hover around you as a sort of guardian angel, to warn you against every transgression that might prevent our final and perpetual re-union."

Compressing her lips forcibly together, to rein in her emotions, the guilty mother shook her head despondingly, and remained silent, for she knew that she could not have commanded her voice, had she attempted to speak.

Rapt, entranced, spell-bound, she gazed upon the seraph face, and hung upon the eloquent lips, of her son, a feeling of reverence gradually

mingling with her attention, as if she were listening to the music of a newly-descended messenger from Heaven. Thus did she remain, until her youthful monitor, exhausted by the effort he had made, again kissed her, and, beseeching her to remember what he had said, begged she would leave him for the present, that he might refresh himself by sleep.

This injunction was obeyed ; but, when his unhappy mother no longer felt the magic influence of his voice, the storm of sorrow, which it had lulled not quelled, again began to agitate her bosom. Nay, the very display of affection and talent which, for the moment, had consoled her, served now to aggravate her grief, for she could not bear the thought that so gifted a creature, the rose, as it were, of the whole world, should be thus prematurely cut off in the bud. For some time past, she had never dared to pray, for without penitence and atonement, she felt that to implore a blessing on her

head would be only a profane mockery and an aggravation of her crime. The feelings of a mother, however, now conquering these scruples of conscience, her stubborn sinews bent, she threw herself upon her knees, and passionately implored that her own life might be taken instead of her beloved son's.

In this, as in every thing else, she acted from the impulse of violent and ungoverned feelings. The thought that her petition might possibly be granted soothed, in some degree, her anguish ; and, when the night was far advanced, she at length sunk to sleep, unconsciously re-iterating her prayer.

CHAPTER VI.

"Here comes the sad denouncer of my fate,
To toll the mournful knell of separation."

DRYDEN.

INSTIGATED by a misdirected zeal, Mrs. Skinner now regularly besieged Cypress House, intruding herself unceremoniously and at the most unseasonable hours, in the hope of being enabled to pour her "leprous distilment" into the ear of the dying Benjamin. But his vigilant mother, too acute to be deceived, too resolute to be intimidated, and entertaining, moreover, no very high opinion of her visitor's discretion, when her fiery fervour was once kindled, pleaded the physician's injunctions that his patient should

not be agitated, and refused all access to the sick chamber.

Baffled, but not repulsed, her visitant, urging the perilous sin of leaving the poor dear youth without spiritual consolation of some sort, begged that he might have an interview with Mr. Grimsby, a friend of her own, a minister of the Gospel, and a person not less remarkable for his strenuous eloquence, than for the soundness of his doctrine and the holiness of his life. Apt as was Mrs. Skinner to malign all those who were beyond the pale of her own religious faith, she was not less prone to overrate those who were within it; either from which tendency, or, as it may be more charitable to suppose, from ignorance of his real character, she had spoken much more favourably of her friend than he deserved.

Bankrupt in character and fortune, Mr. Grimsby had travelled to London, from the North of England; and, finding that he could not

so easily get into any society as by passing through the door of the tabernacle, he joined a brotherhood of ultra-Calvinists. Assuming a most sanctimonious demeanour, and being gifted with a natural and ready eloquence, he presently began to expound to a few select hearers, and, enlarging his views with the number of his auditors, eventually set up for a Gospel minister, and found little difficulty in being enrolled as an itinerant preacher. In this new vocation, which was at first rendered successful by the severity of his doctrine and the fluency of his tongue, it became more than ever necessary to be circumspect and decorous in his way of life; although, as it will be seen in the sequel, he was in reality not less unprincipled than ever.

Let it not be imagined, even for an instant, that we offer this hypocrite as a sample of the sect to which he belonged, and which we have not the remotest intention to disparage. Sincerity and virtue, however widely we may

differ from the doctrinal tenets with which they may be associated, will always command our unqualified reverence ; such is our love of toleration, that we would extend it even to the most intolerant ; nor can any sect or church be injured, by stating that a wolf in sheep's clothing sometimes deceives the vigilance of the appointed watchmen, and steals into the fold.

Notwithstanding Mrs. Skinner's strong recommendations, Mrs. Lomax would not suffer Grimsby to see her sick son until she had consulted the physician, who was so anxious and unremitting in his attendance, that he was already considered rather as the affectionate friend than as the medical adviser of the family.

"Grimsby!" he exclaimed, knitting his brows and shaking his head, "I have heard of this man before, and have seen such injurious effects produced upon one of my patients by his furious denunciations, that I will never give the consent you ask of me. Spiritual consolation, indeed !

what need has our dear Benjamin, what need has this youthful saint of any ghostly comforter, (a title, by the bye, which is totally inapplicable to Mr. Grimsby) when we all know by our own daily experience that he so little requires religious solace in his own person, as to be able to impart it, most sweetly and beneficially, to others. Why should we presumptuously attempt to teach our teacher? Conversant as I am with such scenes, never, never have I seen the beauty of holiness so touchingly, so convincingly, exemplified."

"I always said he was an angel," sighed the mother; "but Mrs. Skinner has doubts of his acceptance, because he has experienced no ecstasies, seen no visions of coming glory, tasted no antepast of the promised beatitudes."

"So much the better; I distrust these spurious raptures, knowing that they are often succeeded by despair and mental horrors that border upon phrensy. In our dear Benjamin we behold no

spiritual intoxication, no enthusiasm, no despondency ; all is calm conviction, placid resignation, and a tranquil but heartfelt gratitude. He, who out of the mouths of babes and sucklings ordained strength and perfected praise, will assuredly not desert the youth whom he has endowed with such marvellous gifts of grace. No, no, our blessed Benjamin, for such he is in every sense, must see nothing of this ghostly *dis-comforter*, this fire-denouncing Mr. Grimsby."

The party whose exclusion had been thus determined, was not, however, by any means disposed to submit to the decree when it was communicated to him. For various reasons, he was particularly anxious to obtain a footing in Cypress House. Urging, therefore, an imperative sense of duty, as a pretext for a gratuitous act of impertinence, he called one morning and desired the servant to conduct him to the sick chamber, into which, immediately after the

announcement of his name, he intruded himself.

The countenances of its occupants, when he had briefly and without apology proclaimed his errand, presented a variety sufficiently marked to deserve a passing notice. Grimsby was a middle-aged man of a sallow, sodden complexion, a stern, forbidding, callous aspect, “a villainous low forehead,” and a shock of bristly black hair, thatching a large mis-shapen head. Opposite to him, gracefully reclined the young, the fair, the golden-locked Benjamin, his azure eyes benignantly beaming as he gazed with a smile of welcome on the stranger. Very different was the expression of his mother, her fine features, always characteristic of energy and decision, being now knit and darkened into a most significant frown of suppressed indignation. Her husband, whose face had become blotched and bloated by habitual intemperance, had only partly recovered from the first alarm occasioned

by the abrupt entrance of a new visitant, for his restless, suspicious eyes still wandered about the room, or watched the door, in evident apprehension of some lurking treachery. At the foot of the bed sate Mary, pale and pensive, her affectionate regards now fixed upon her sick brother, and now turned appealingly to the intruder, as if to deprecate any proceeding that might disturb the bland serenity of the invalid.

Not perceiving, or not heeding, this silent entreaty, Grimsby immediately began to interrogate the youth as to his having been visited by that supernatural and ecstatic assurance of divine favour and acceptance, which is technically termed an experience. Benjamin declared that he had not received any such direct and positive manifestation ; though he had an humble yet firm reliance on the mercy of the Deity, and felt perfectly at ease in his mind. Shaking his head at this answer, his questioner bade him beware of an overweening confidence that might plunge

him into hopeless perdition and everlasting torment!

“I am but an inexperienced youth, and it becomes me not to argue with you, even if I were able,” meekly replied Benjamin, the liquid suavity of whose voice, after the loud dissonance of his catechist, fell like softest music on the ear. “From this blessed book,” he continued, laying his hand upon the Bible, “it were not difficult, I think, to show that you are in error, might I, without presumption, enter into theological controversy with a minister of the Gospel. But there is another comforter in the room, whose whisperings, audible to me, though not, perhaps, to you, I may in all humility venture to repeat. Mary, give me yonder flower-pot from the table. Look, Mr. Grimsby, at this rose; it has expanded and blown before my eyes, this very morning, while I have been watching and meditating upon the miracle of its birth. It fills me with reverence, I had almost said with awe, for

to me it seems to bear the last touches of the Creator's hand, and though its root be in the earth, I cannot otherwise behold it than as a newly-alighted messenger of peace from Heaven. Its breath savours of the sky, and as its lips gently move with the air waited from mine, methinks I hear it preaching to me thus : ' Behold how the wide-spread earth is every where adorned and garnished with flowers, all beautiful, all exquisite, all infinitely diversified in form, in colour, and in fragrance. Every season, every hour, hath its floral treasures, some giving forth their odours and expanding their charms in the night only, as if it were meant that even the casually-belated traveller should not be without a cheering solace on his road. For what purpose is the earth made pleasant and lovely by these perfumed pictures, unless for the delectation of its noblest inhabitant — Man ? Thinkest thou that the same benignant Deity, the same Father of his children, who hath been

thus so careful to lavish upon them even superfluous graces and enjoyments, during their evanescent existence in this world, can find delight in condemning them to torture and despair in that which is to last for ever? When thou hearest a mistaken fellow-creature thus attempting to dethrone the all-loving, all-bountiful, all-merciful Creator, and to set up a demon in his place, point to the flowers, point to a rose, and say, Even were there no Bible, this should be my refutation of your doctrine, this my hope and trust, this my assurance of goodness and of mercy, this my defence of the calumniated Deity! ”

With looks of the utmost horror, the exasperated fanatic began to pour forth a fresh torrent of denunciation against all who could entertain such pernicious notions, when Mrs. Lomax, leading or rather dragging him out of the room, exclaimed, as she shut the door behind her, “ Go, sir, leave my house, and return

not to it a second time. You a comforter of the sick ! I would rather send the vulture to console the dove, or the tiger the kid, than suffer you again to visit my angel son."

"I forgive your rudeness, and I sincerely pity your infatuation," said Grimsby, conscious that he had allowed his irritable arrogance to carry him too far, and endeavouring to appease the indignation he had excited. "I have been discharging a solemn but painful duty, with the execution of which I never suffer the forms and ceremonies of life to interfere. Heaven grant that neither you nor your son be labouring under a soul-involving delusion ! Heaven grant that you may not have loved him too blindly, either for his own eternal happiness, or for your's ! Much, much do I fear that you have forgotten the Giver in the gift, the Creator in the creature, and have thus converted a blessing into a curse. If so, God will punish your idolatry by taking away your idol, and will direct your mind to-

wards heavenly comforts, by leaving you without a single solace upon earth. Should this prediction be verified, I will visit you in your trouble, assist you with my counsel, and endeavour to guide you Zionward. In the mean time, peace be with you."

These words, spoken in an oracular tone, and rendered significant by the secret presentiments of her own heart, made more impression upon Mrs. Lomax than she chose to confess, even to herself. At a subsequent period they frequently recurred to her, and led to results of the most distressing and fatal nature.

"I hope you have dismissed our visitor gently and with due acknowledgments," said her son, when she returned to his apartment. "His intentions are doubtless good, and I am most thankful for his kindness, though I cannot coincide in his views. Good motives may well reconcile us to an erroneous opinion, if such, indeed, it be, for which of us, fallible and

erring creatures as we all are, shall presume to say—I alone am right?"

Several days passed after this conversation, without producing any perceptible change in the appearance or symptoms of the invalid, except an occasional difficulty of breathing, which slightly inconvenienced him when talking. Instead of being overclouded as he approached his end, his intellect became daily more bright and clear, and his mood more serene ; and all that was earthly about him seemed to be gradually spiritualising, in preparation for the great change. As the sailor-boy at the mast-head descries the land ere it is revealed to his comrades, and announces it with a shout of joy ; as the young lark, soaring up to heaven, discovers the yet unrisen sun, and sends down the tidings to the earth in gushes of melodious gladness ; so did the uplifted soul of this favoured youth catch glimpses of a coming glory, which so brightened and celestialised his

countenance, so illuminated his mind, so cheered and exalted his heart, that they who gazed upon his surpassing beauty, and heard the holy effusions that fell in music from his lips, felt their love and admiration solemnized by a thrilling awe, as if they stood in the presence of a superior nature, and were listening to a revelation from the world of spirits.

It was evening, and, as Benjamin reclined upon his bed surrounded by his family, and soothing their sorrows into reverence and resignation by such discourse as we have been describing, he desired that the window might be thrown open, for the weather was sultry, and he thought the air might relieve him. The beams of the setting sun, reflected by a crimson cloud, threw a flush of light into the room, that imparted a glow of seeming health to the sick youth, who drew himself a little higher up on the pillow, and gazed out, through his favourite flowers in the window, upon the animated river, and the

mingled houses and green fields that skirted its opposite banks as it wound away towards the east. A fresh, a balmy air was wafted into the apartment, filling it with the fragrance of the roses over which it passed ; the rustling of boughs and the song of birds was heard from the garden ; and a musical snuff-box, which had been purchased by Mrs. Lomax for the recreation of the invalid, filled his ear, in fairy-like tinklings, with Luther's Hymn, a melody in which he found particular delight, from the associations with which it was connected.

" How pleasant, how delightful is it," he exclaimed, when the music had ceased, " thus to behold the setting sun, and the beautiful sky, and the variegated earth, and the gleaming river, and to catch the busy hum of this great city, not so near as to disturb the thoughts, and yet distinct enough to awaken all the social sympathies, of the heart ! Mine is elated at this moment with a new, a sweet, an indescribable sensation,

as if it were yearning, more ardently than ever, for that glorious heaven which is looking so benignantly down upon me. I feel that my days, my hours, are rapidly drawing to a close, and oh ! how thankful should I be if I might pass away now, even now, cheered by the light, and fanned by the airs of heaven, surrounded with sweet odours, and music, and beauty, and closing my eyes amid the love-beaming looks of all those who are dear to me upon earth, in the blessed hope of again meeting them in heaven.”

He paused, but his rapt companions made no reply, for they derived a mournful solace from his discourse, and invited him by their silence to resume it. He did so, after a while, exclaiming, in a weaker voice, “I am very, very happy ; I am wonderfully sustained, as if by an invisible hand drawing me heavenward. Ah ! if my wish could at this instant be realised, how truly might I exclaim, ‘O death ! where

is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory?" "

Again there was a silence of a few minutes, when he continued, in a tone so faint as to be scarcely audible, "I feel as if I should sleep—good night!—God bless you all!"

With these words he laid his cheek upon the pillow, and, looking at his mother, attempted to speak, but, finding himself unable, he beckoned her towards him, pointed to his mouth, and made a motion with his lips, as if inviting her to kiss them. She did so with a gentle tenderness, for she feared to disturb him, and ejaculated a whispered return of his benediction, after which he closed his eyes, and appeared to fall tranquilly asleep.—It was the quiet sleep of death! His prayer had been heard, his mother had received his parting breath, he had died like a flower, which exhales itself tranquilly to heaven in the midst of sweetness and of beauty.

Anxious to prolong his seeming slumber, his

mother gently closed the window, hushingly whispered her husband and Mary to withdraw, and seated herself at the foot of the bed, brooding over him with a solicitude so fond that she feared to move, and almost to breathe, lest she should awaken him. The setting sun, chequered by the flowers in the window, fell upon his waxen features, and flickered amid his golden locks, until, as she gazed intently upon him, she fancied his head to be surrounded by a divine halo, and mentally ejaculated, “ Assuredly this is no son of mine, no mortal youth, but a seraph whom Heaven has vouchsafed to send down awhile upon the earth, and now, alas ! is preparing to reclaim. Instead of repining, should this unmerited boon be withdrawn from me, I should rather be grateful that I have been suffered to enjoy it so long. And yet to part—to part for ever ! I cannot, cannot reconcile my mind to a thought so withering, so agonising.”

At this moment, the last rays of light fading slowly from the room, she turned her eyes towards the western heavens, and sorrowfully thought, “ Ah ! when the great orb of day sinks beneath the horizon, we mark its disappearance amid the gathering darkness without regret, for we know that a morning will succeed, and that we shall again be warmed and cheered with its renovating beams ; but when *my* day-star shall set in the gloom of the grave, when my beloved Benjamin shall sink into the earth, no morning will revive him, no daylight will again dawn upon my benighted heart—all will be gloom, desolation, despair ! ”

Again she fixed her looks upon the bed, until it became vague and indistinct in the gathering shades of evening ; but the fair features and the gleaming locks of her son made a dim light of their own, upon which she continued to gaze, until the night had set in, pleased at the thought that he was enjoying so deep and continuous a

slumber. To prevent his being disturbed by the entrance of servants, she had given orders that candles should always be left on a slab outside, so as to be ready when wanted. Cautiously opening the door, and stealing out on tiptoe, she brought them in, and deposited them at the further end of the room, casting a look at the supposed sleeper, as she returned to her seat. His attitude remained precisely the same, but his eyes were not quite closed, and there was an indescribable something in his aspect which suddenly electrified her with a suspicion of the dreadful truth.

Starting to his side, she thrice ejaculated his name, beginning with a hoarse whisper, and rising into an impatient cry. All was motionless, all was silent ! Agonised by this confirmation of her fears, she snatched up his outstretched hand. It was cold as marble ; and, as she flung it from her, with an irrepressible shudder, it fell rattling upon the little table by

the bed-side, where it lay, stark and inanimate.

Another moment's suspense would have been intolerable. She shook him with an impassioned vehemence, she threw herself upon his death-chilled face—all her doubts were in an instant dispelled, all her hopes were quenched for ever ; and as she recoiled from thus embracing a corpse, a shriek of thrilling anguish, the shriek of a bereft mother, broke from her lips, and echoed through the whole house.

“ He is dead ! he is dead ! he is dead ! ” she reiterated, with a look and accent of utter despair. “ O God ! what a pang shoots through my heart ! It is broken, it has burst asunder ; and my brain, my brain ! ” she continued, suddenly clasping her head with both hands, “ it throbs, it whirls, it is on fire, I shall go mad ! ”

For a brief space, she remained in this attitude, bitterly brooding over a bereavement which at

every instant appeared to her distempered mind more cruel, more outrageous, more intolerable. Although her son had been given over by the physicians, and had himself repeatedly announced to her his approaching death, she had so clung to the belief of his recovery, so hoped in the midst of hopelessness, that she was quite unprepared for the blow when at length it fell upon her.

The natural violence of her disposition, restrained and pent up during her long attendance in the sick chamber, now burst forth with an accumulated and ungovernable fury. She gnashed her teeth, and, glaring wildly around the room, with the look of an enraged lioness whose young one has been shot by the hunter, exclaimed, in accents of almost frantic desperation, “So, then! I am standing in the presence of the grisly tyrant, of the grim destroyer—Death! He is here in this very room, triumphing over his victim, preparing to feast upon his

prey, upon my beloved boy, my beautiful, my angelic Benjamin. Accursed monster! thou shalt not have his body. Ruthless, remorseless, damned fiend, come forth!—let me see thee, let me clutch thee; I dare thee to appear; I challenge thee to the combat. I am alone, unarmed, a woman; but I am a maddened mother, and I feel strong enough to tear thee into ten thouands pieces, and to eat thy savage heart!"

Overcome by this raving ebullition, the wretched woman sank unconsciously into a chair, whence, however, she presently started, and exclaimed, "Benjamin dead! I will not survive him—I too will die—we will all die—the whole world shall die." Then, stamping violently upon the floor, she continued in an infuriated tone, "Oh that I could crush this hated earth to atoms with my heel, and trample out the sun, and consign the whole universe to nothingness and night!"

The vehemence of her gesticulations, the loudness of her voice, and the terrible distortion of her inflamed features, presented, at this moment, an appalling contrast to the fixed immobility, the placid pale face, and the never-to-be-broken silence of the deceased youth, over whose unchanged beauty death had not yet exercised the smallest dominion.

Lomax, who had caught the sound of her passionate exclamations, now entered the room, and seemed to produce a change in her feelings, for she pointed to the dead body with an apparent calmness, and said, in a hoarse, composed voice, "All is over — Benjamin is dead!"

"Poor fellow! poor fellow!" exclaimed the father, who had been quite prepared for the catastrophe. "God's will be done! he died without pain or sorrow, and we have discharged our duty as parents up to the last. This will always be a consolation to us."

“Consolation!” sneered the mother, smiling in bitter spirit. “There may be consolation for *you*”—this word she pronounced with a strong expression of contempt—“but for me there is none—none—none!”

Alarmed by the fixed despair that gave a look of iron to her features, and anxious to withdraw her from the sight of the dead body, though he scarcely knew how to set about it, Lomax said, in a soothing voice, “Nay, dear Jane, you cannot deny that this dispensation has been wonderfully tempered with mercy—we must submit patiently to the decrees of Heaven. Come, let us quit this chamber of death. It is late—it is supper-time.”

“You are right, you are right,” cried the wife, starting from her profound abstraction, with an altered air, “let us quit this hateful, this revolting apartment. Let us sear our eyes no more by gazing on this hideous spectacle. *That* is not my Benjamin, my beautiful boy, my se-

raph son. Pah ! it is an abomination to my sight—a heap of carrion and corruption. Away ! away ! ”

As she spoke thus, her eyes and countenance flared with a wild animation, she ran to her husband, seized his arm, and hurried him down stairs, rapidly exclaiming—“ Did you not say it was supper-time ? Ha ! ha ! ha ! Well ! why not ? Let us carouse and sing, and drive away thought ; for thought will madden us. It was no fool who said, ‘ Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.’ To-morrow ? There will be no to-morrow for Benjamin ; he died to-day, and we will forget him before the night is out. Ay, and forget ourselves, too, which is better still. Ha, ha, ha ! ”

Having by this time entered the dining-room, where the table was laid for supper, always an important meal with the luxurious Lomax, she filled a tumbler with wine, emptied it at a draught, and continued, with a look and voice

of delirious exhilaration, “ Come, Joel, drink, drink ! let us invite our friends, and light up the house, and have a grand gala and a dance. Ha, ha, ha ! The sepulchre shall be our ball-room, and we will drink out of skulls, and I will dress myself in a shroud and winding-sheet, and Death shall be my partner, and when he is lifting up his glass to pledge me in a bumper, I will plunge this knife into the villain’s heart ! Oh, glorious, glorious ! Ha, ha, ha ! ”

In concluding this rhapsody, she had snatched a knife from the tabe, which she brandished menacingly in the air, to the infinite dismay of her husband, whose consternation was still further increased, when she suddenly seized him by both hands, and whirling him round and round with a convulsive energy, cried out, “ Come, let us rehearse our dance. Ha, ha, ha ! Faster, faster ; it is our last reel. What ! are you frightened ? Ha, ha, ha ! Now we whirl, now we spin — glorious, glorious ! Ha, ha, ha ! ”

Nature could hold out no longer. To the unspeakable relief of the husband, who was half dead with terror, his distracted wife released her grasp and fell upon the floor, writhing, shrieking, and laughing in the most appalling hysterics.

CHAPTER VII.

“Thou, thou villain !
Hast push'd my boat to open sea, to prove
At my sad cost if thou can't steer it back.
It cannot be. I'm lost too far: I'm ruined.
Hence, thou impostor, traitor, monster, devil !
I can no more: thou and my griefs have sunk
Me down so low, that I want voice to curse thee.”

ALL FOR LOVE.

THE surprise, the shame, the embarrassment, and the conflicting emotions of Rose and of Hunter, when they respectively perused Helen's letter, announcing her departure from London, and her determination to remain thenceforward separated from them, in all probability for ever, who shall attempt to describe ?

A bereavement, scarcely less startling than

if she had received the tidings of her friend's sudden death, superseded for the moment every other feeling in the bosom of the sensitive Rose, who, when she recollect ed what she owed to her for all her past favours, for the noble munificence communicated in her present letter, and the sacrifices of all sorts involved in her perpetual self-banishment from London, sunk under a weight of obligation that almost crushed her heart. Upbraiding herself with the blackest ingratitude towards her benefactress, she gave way to an agony of remorse, which, in conjunction with the illness produced by her immersion in the river, confined her for several days to her bed, and threatened for the moment to disturb her senses.

Gradually, however, her mental vision became less distorted, and she was relieved from much of her suffering and agitation by being enabled to view recent occurrences in their true light. Why should she thus bitterly accuse

herself? In what had she offended? The *eclaircissement* which had produced such strange and unexpected results was purely accidental. Imprudent she might have been in bestowing her affections upon Hunter, but she had locked up the secret in her heart, and had kept it inviolate, until it had been divulged by a combination of circumstances over which she had no control ; besides, she had prepared herself, if not gladly, at least resolutely, to make the same sacrifice of love upon the altar of friendship, in which she had now been anticipated by the generous Helen.

These considerations removed much of her immediate distress, but she still remained inconsolable for the loss of her companion, and overcome by the magnitude of her bounty ; while the painful awkwardness of the situation in which she was placed with reference to Hunter filled her with an anxious gloom, into which the dawnings of the happiness, likely to

arise from recent occurrences, had not yet begun to penetrate.

Nor were Hunter's feelings, in the first instance, much more enviable than those of his mistress, for such is the term that we must now apply to Rose. He, too, accused himself of the most unfeeling demeanour towards Helen at the time of the accident, although his offence was involuntary ; he too was stung with a sense of ingratitude, especially when he adverted to the contents of her letter ; and he began to think that he had never fully appreciated the character of this magnanimous girl, until he had lost her for ever. But these upbraidings of a delicate and honourable mind were soon mitigated by considerations of a more soothing nature. Much as he admired and respected Helen, grateful as he was for the affections she had bestowed upon him, and the frank liberality she had evinced in all the preliminary arrangements of their intended marriage, he could not

conceal from himself that he had never loved her, and that he felt gratified at being released from an engagement contracted in the hope of securing happiness to others, rather than to himself.

Now, too, did he discover and feel for the first time the full extent of his suppressed passion for Rose Mayhew. No sooner was it fanned by the breath of hope, than the spark which had been so long smouldering in his bosom kindled into a flame, that burnt the more ardently when it found a vent, because it had been so closely confined. Visions of felicity and independence, such as he had never dared to anticipate, even in imagination, began to float before his eyes, and he hung with delight over the sweet assurance in Helen's letter, that his affection for her friend was fully reciprocated. Of this, indeed, he had previously cherished a suspicion, which Rose's exclamation, and above all her looks and demeanour

on her revival in the boat, unconscious as she might be of her deportment on that occasion, placed beyond the reach of doubt.

From the difficulties and delicate scruples, which might still have separated those whom nature and accident had combined to bring together, they were liberated by the prompt intervention of Mrs. Hunter. That good lady's olio of exclamations, when she learnt the flight of Helen and its cause, as well as her surpassing generosity to Harriet Rose, was of too mosaic a character to admit of transcription.

“Only to think!” she repeatedly ejaculated, “only to think of Alfred not caring, after all, for Helen, rich as she was, and falling in love with that strange, wild-looking, odd girl, without a penny, who always seemed to me more like a little sprite than real flesh and blood. To be sure she won’t look so, I dare say, now that she has got a fortune of her own. Well, I always liked her myself, ever since she gave

me such a pretty collar for our cat Madge. A capital mouser she is! and I dare say will make an excellent wife — only she's very apt to scratch, and is a terrible thief when there's any cold fish in the cupboard, that I must say of poor Madge. We sha'n't be able to return to Monkwell, after all, that's the worst of the affair, and I can think of nothing else—nothing! Dear! dear! what *has* become of the kettle-holder? It has been missing ever since yesterday."

By the aid of this active and zealous, if not able negociator, a meeting was arranged between the lovers, as soon as Rose had sufficiently recovered from her indisposition, the embarrassment of both parties being relieved by a previous exchange of the letters they had received from Helen. In these she had truly told them that their courtship was already made, their mutual love declared, that they were the affianced wife and betrothed husband of each

other. Notwithstanding this preparation for their first interview, Rose was so completely overcome that she trembled like an aspen leaf, and, shaking down her tresses over her burning cheeks, sunk into the arms of her lover, unable to articulate a word.

“O, Mr. Hunter !” she at length murmured, gently disengaging herself, as he pressed her to his bosom ; “our dear Helen has truly told you that I have no parents, no relations, and now—now that my oldest, my best——forgive me this gush of tears ; indeed, indeed, I cannot help it—now that Helen is torn away from me, I shall have no friend in the wide world but yourself. After what has passed, it were vain trifling to deny the state of my affections. I give up my whole heart to you ; I will devote myself to your happiness, and, if you have any sorrows, I will share them with you. But oh ! for my sake, for your own sake, for the sake of our dear, dear Helen, remember her solemn

warning, and do not give either of us reason to repent hereafter the confidence we have reposed in you."

To this affecting appeal Hunter made a suitable reply, acknowledging that his previous indiscretions had afforded just ground for their misgivings, but pledging himself, with an impassioned fervour, to redeem all his past errors by his future conduct, and his entire devotion to his beloved Rose. Meeting from this moment with less awkwardness and perplexity, and with an increasing admiration of each other, the lovers enjoyed, in almost daily interviews, a delightful courtship and interchange of confidence, which already seemed to make atonement for much of their past sufferings and anxiety. One unpleasant feeling, however, lingered in the bosom of both: they were oppressed by the magnitude of Helen's munificence, which they felt to be more than their benefactress ought to bestow, or themselves to

receive ; and, notwithstanding her peremptory injunctions to the contrary, they determined on requesting her to diminish the amount of her gift, as soon as they should have learnt the place of her retreat.

In the course of a few days the fugitive imparted this secret, under the most solemn injunctions of secrecy, to Mary Lomax, who kindly undertook to snatch a moment from the melancholy affairs of Cypress House, and to communicate their joint wishes to Helen. In a reply, couched in terms of the most inflexible decision, she refused to make the smallest alteration in her arrangements, adding that she desired the whole money to be settled, so as to secure it against the possibility of future improvidence ; and protesting that she would not put herself in correspondence with Rose until she received the intelligence of her marriage, which shewished to be celebrated, as she had before urged, without any further

delay. Two months, however, had elapsed from the time of her leaving London, before the nuptials were solemnized.

During this interval, Hunter, who, in anticipation of Helen's recommendation, had for some time been employed on a work of fiction, published it with such unexpected success, that he not only realised a considerable present sum, but made a most advantageous engagement for supplying future works in the same department of literature. With this prospect of realising an independence for himself, in addition to that of Rose, he determined, to the unspeakable delight of his mother, who was invited to live with them, on returning to Monkwell, as originally intended. Thither they accordingly betook themselves after the marriage; and there, for the present, we must leave them.

Sad and desolating had been the effect produced in these two short months upon the mind of the wretched Mrs. Lomax, whose

usual energy failed her the most deplorably when she had the greatest need of its assistance and support. Had she shared her husband's perpetual alarms about the return of Edward Ruddock to Europe, and the consequent detection and punishment of their crime, her bold spirit would have been braced up to a state of tension which might have rendered it less sensible to the present blow; but so long a time had now elapsed without any tidings of this dreaded claimant, or any other occurrence to excite reasonable alarm on the subject, that she had sunk into a fancied security, which only assisted to unnerve her.

As the paper kite, sustained and kept elate by the very string that threatens to drag it down, falters and falls to the ground when its hold is broken, and its influence no longer felt, so did Mrs. Lomax, who had kept bravely up while the halter around her neck seemed to be incessantly drawing her towards the place of

execution, give way and sink into an utter prostration the moment she ceased to be supported by a spirit of resistance. Her beloved Benjamin, the only remaining tie which had lifted her, as it were, above the earth by attaching her to it, was now severed from her for ever, and a hopeless desolation suddenly darkened her void heart like a thunder-cloud lowering over the desert. That most withering of all reflections, the remembrance of a great crime perpetrated in vain, haunted her as if it were the spectral shadow of her soul, and she often muttered to herself, in her fits of moody remorse — “I am justly punished ! I am justly punished ! — It was for *his* sake that I violated the laws of God and man ; for *his* sake that I gave over my precious soul to perdition ; and *he* is taken from me, *he* is gone, *he* is dead ! Nothing but sorrow and shame have I gained by my wickedness ; for, in losing *him*, I have lost every thing—all—all—all ! ”

It was remarkable that after the death of Benjamin she never ventured to trust her lips with the utterance of his name, although she referred to him, either directly or indirectly, nearly as often as she spoke. Her own thoughts being entirely engrossed with one object, she did not suppose it possible that her hearers could imagine her to be alluding to any other. Her son had been the whole world to her while he was alive, and out of that world she could not wander, now that he was dead.

Many sufferers under a distressing bereavement seek to stimulate the memory, and, at the same time, to alleviate their sorrows, by wearing about their persons the miniature, the hair, or some other memento of the cherished object they have lost, as if they were not altogether separated while yet able to gaze upon these present memorials of the departed. The grief of Mrs. Lomax was so intense and

absorbing to need, or even to bear, the sight of any such painful remembrances.

Steeped as it ever was in the anguish of unbroken recollection, her heart could not sustain any additional excitement from the senses ; and it was her first order, therefore, that every thing should be carefully removed from her sight which might awaken distressing reminiscences, or interfere with the reveries of which *he* already formed the sole object. She wished her eyes and ears to shut him out, in order that she might brood over the thoughts of him in the silence of her inward soul with a fonder and more entire abstraction.

For the first fortnight after his death, she was completely stunned by the blow, wandering about the house in a stupor of grief, and scarcely conscious of her words, while issuing the orders to which we have alluded. Hitherto she had not shed a tear ; her fine features seemed to have assumed the consistency

as well as the hue of marble, and her countenance wore that expression of fixed and calm despair, which is so much more appalling to behold than the most violent paroxysms of passion.

This suspension of sensibility, the more noticeable from its contrast to the usual vehemence of her temperament, was dispelled by an incident, trivial in itself, but not unimportant in its consequences. In removing some books that had belonged to the deceased, one of the servants found a sealed letter addressed to his mistress, to whom he immediately delivered it. As she recognised the well-known writing of her son, a cry of surprise burst from her lips, her heart throbbed violently, and her trembling hands hardly enabled her to break open the paper, of which the following were the contents :

“ Dearest, dearest Mother !

“ From the place in which I have purposely deposited this letter, you will not, in all

probability, receive it until the death-struggle is over, and I shall be lying in the coldness, the darkness, and the silence of the grave. This reflection imparts a solemnity to my feelings as I am writing, which I would fain communicate to you as you are reading, that so I may make the deeper impression upon your mind. Come to me, dear mother, in the sepulchre ! Carry your thoughts down into the vault wherein I am placed ; behold your dead son in his winding-sheet and shroud ; mark how the eyes on which you loved to gaze are closed for ever : how the lips that you have so fondly pressed, are livid and icy ; how the voice which, as you have often told me, sounded to your ears as if you had music in your heart, is hushed, and can never more thank you for all your love ! I wish you to sit in imagination beside my corpse, in order that my words may have the awfulness of a warning uttered from beyond the grave ; in order that you may wean

your memory from a mass of clay and corruption ; in order that you may detach yourself from the earth, and think only how to secure our future and inseparable union in the realms of bliss.

“ Mother ! be comforted for my loss. This will be my last prayer on earth, my first aspiration from the world of spirits. Nowhere, nowhere can this comfort be found except in religion. You will have seen how its divine assurances supported me, even in my separation from the best, the fondest, the most indulgent of parents.

“ Mother ! I have addressed my letter to *you*, because I foresee that your grief will be the most acute, your heart the most inconsolable ; but I wish this posthumous warning and entreaty to be communicated to my dear father, and my ever affectionate Mary, with my renewed thanks for all their tenderness and love, my renewed entreaties for forgiveness

if ever I have offended them. Farewell! farewell for ever! God bless you all! Amen! Amen!

“ BENJAMIN LOMAX.”

As she perused this affecting appeal, the electrified mother started from the previous stupor of her grief, her feelings underwent a sudden revulsion, the petrified Horeb of her heart was smitten, as if by a hand thrust from forth the grave, and the pent up waters gushed from her eyes in a passion of weeping. They were the first tears she had shed since the death of her son, and they afforded her so grateful a relief, that she almost hesitated to wipe them away, although they baffled her attempt as often as she strove to reperuse the letter, which she was fain, therefore, to press to her bosom with both hands, as she indistinctly sobbed, “ My blessed boy! my angelic Benjamin! I will obey thee! — I will obey thee!”

This, however, she found to be impossible.

In losing Benjamin, she had lost all consolation, all joy, all hope. The splendour with which she was surrounded became hateful in her sight, as an accusing evidence of her guilt ; she found no relief in opulence, no pleasure in society, no charm in existence. Earth was now a hell to her ; and, if she ventured to turn her thoughts heavenward, she felt herself repelled from the very threshold, and driven back to wander and to mourn, as a hopeless outcast, in a cheerless and detested world.

“Oh ! that he had been taken from me,” would she sometimes ejaculate, in the bitterness of her self-upbraidings, “before I had forfeited my hopes of mercy by this mad and useless crime ; for then, then could I have endured life and have welcomed death in the soul-entrancing prospect of rejoining him. Accursed wretch that I am ! what avails it that he is at this moment kneeling for me at the throne of grace ? His intercessions cannot be heard, for

I have made no atonement for my iniquity, and am still wasting in voluptuousness what I have acquired by fraud. Hark ! I hear his sweet and silvery voice calling me heavenward, but I cannot answer, for I am sin-bound to the earth. Look, look, he is leaning from out the sky—his golden ringlets fall forward, he stretches forth his arms, and invites me upwards with his celestial smile of love, but I cannot soar to join him, for Satan has fast hold of my feet, and is dragging me downwards. Horrible ! horrible ! ”

At this moment, she seemed to be smitten with a momentary delirium, for her husband chancing to enter the room, she sprang upon him, and grasping him by the throat with both hands, screamed out as she violently shook him :

“ Villain ! villain ! it was your accursed deed, your forgery of the will, that has ruined us both for ever, condemning us to misery in this world,

and cutting us off from all chance of joining our blessed boy hereafter ! ”

“ Jane ! dear Jane ! ” croaked the terrified and half-throttled husband, “ for Heaven’s sake, speak not so loud, you will be overheard. How am I to blame ? Who was it that first suggested the crime to me ? who combated and ridiculed all my objections ? who urged, nay, drove, me forward with threats, when I would have abandoned the enterprize ? who assisted from first to last in its execution, but you, you, you ? ”

“ It is too true ! it is too true ! ” sighed the wife, speaking in a calmer tone, and relaxing her hold ; “ I despise you for your unmanly cowardice in yielding to my menaces, and I detest myself for the guilty audacity that impelled you forwards. Yes ; I scorn, I loathe, both myself and you — both the instigator and the instrument of our crime. Joel, let us come to an understanding. I am miserable beyond

endurance. I cannot, will not, bear any longer this torturing suspense — this horrible despair."

"Despair, dear Jane! What, what has occurred? No proceedings have been instituted ; there are no fresh tidings of Edward Ruddock."

"I care not if there were. Nay, I wish he were at this moment thundering at our gate, with the officers of justice at his heel. Listen to me, Joel, with all your ears, for your fate, your life, as well as my own, are, perchance, involved in what I am about to say. Early and late, by night and by day, have I been brooding over a project which I am now resolved to carry into instant execution, though not without apprising you of my intention. Joel ! there is no chance for us of happiness in this world, no hope of salvation in the next—no possibility of again embracing our dear boy, while our crime remains undivulged, and we retain the fortune of which we have defrauded the rightful

heir. We must undo the wrong that we have perpetrated : it is better late than never. I will go before a magistrate, alone, if you hesitate to accompany me, and confess our crime, and offer to make full restitution of our spoil, by which voluntary surrender we may perhaps—”

“ Gracious Heaven ! ” interrupted the husband, utterly aghast with terror, “ do you mean what you say?—are you mad ? Would you not only steep us once more to the lips in poverty, but expose us to shame, to imprisonment, to the risk of a public execution ? ”

“ By our voluntary confession, and the restoration of our plunder, we may not improbably escape the heavier penalties of the law, and, by thus gaining time for repentance, be enabled to make our peace with Heaven, and be ultimately admitted into the society of our blessed son. With this prospect in view, oh how joyfully would I undergo poverty, scorn,

imprisonment, and even the terrors of an ignominious death ! ”

“The very thought of which makes me shudder,” said the husband, whose inflamed features had been gradually assuming a ghastly hue. “What ! sink again into a life of labour and squalid misery !—give up our house and equipage, our rare wines and our sumptuous dinners, our burnt brandy and our seasoned suppers ? Horrible ! ”

Every argument and every persuasive that he could command was eagerly urged against the appalling scheme of his wife, which he attributed to a temporary alienation of mind, but she clung to her project with a stubborn doggedness that gathered strength from opposition, and Lomax, whose terrors sharpened his intellect, refrained from a direct contest of which he saw the inutility, and dreaded the effect in her present irritable mood.

“This insane idea will pass away, and she

will be herself again," he thought. "I must gain time and watch her closely, and never trust her out of my sight."

The sound of his daughter's voice suggested to him a new and more potent dissuasive than any he had hitherto advanced; he enlarged upon the monstrous cruelty of rushing upon a desperate measure which would inevitably break off Mary's marriage, involve her in their own ignominy, and render her miserable for life.

" You will not," he exclaimed in conclusion, " you will not destroy this innocent, this excellent, this affectionate girl. I am sure you will not. You have not the heart to do it."

" The heart! the heart!" echoed the wife, smiling in bitter spirit. " *I have* no heart. My bosom has emptied itself into the grave where *he* is lying, stiff and stark. But you are right. I had forgotten poor Mary. Better to endure my own misery a little longer, than to entail

shame and misery upon her. But *can I, can I* suffer this intolerable anguish? I know not which way to turn me, nor how to act, and I dare not call upon Heaven to assist me. Go! begone, leave me! I cannot talk to any one, least of all to *you*. I must commune with my own sad thoughts."

The heart of Lomax sank within him as he obeyed her, for he saw by her bewildered looks that her faculties were beginning to wander, and, though she appeared for the moment to have abandoned her terrific project, he dreaded lest, in some fit of ungovernable passion or dark despair, she might still rush upon its execution.

CHAPTER VIII.

— “This, this is woe !
Despair and anguish darken round their view,
And all but sorrow seems to be untrue.”

R. MONTGOMERY.

— “She’s lost for ever!
It was a dreadful moment; not the tears,
The lingering, lasting misery of years,
Could match that minute’s anguish.”

MOORE.

MARY LOMAX’s anxiety, alarms, and dark misgivings, during this most distressing period, we shall not attempt to record. It had been agreed that her marriage should be deferred for three months, and, though the expiration of this term was now near at hand, she could not chase from her mind a sinister foreboding that some unexpected discovery or calamitous event

would still further protract, if not finally prevent, her expected nuptials.

Grief for the loss of a brother to whom she was tenderly attached had, perhaps, predisposed her mind for melancholy impressions, and she had latterly seen and heard more than enough to justify her mistrust. In the frequent altercations of her parents, to which she could not shut her ears so effectually as she wished, hasty expressions were occasionally dropped, which failed not to revive and to fortify her painful suspicions.

Latterly, their mutual criminations had become more loud and unguarded than ever; nor could Mary divest herself of the notion that the prostration of spirits, and comparative imbecility into which her mother usually sunk, after these passionate ebullitions, indicated a mind broken down by remorse, rather than by grief.

After all, these were but vague and indistinct

apprehensions ; she could not assign any specific form to her fears, importunate as they were : they might, indeed, be altogether visionary, and she would not suffer the shadows thus passing over her soul to diminish her gratitude for the sunshine with which it was refreshed at this season of sore trial.

Foremost among the solaces that sustained her was the affectionate sympathy of her lover, who shared her troubles and her counsels, and relieved her, by his considerate interference, from many of the painful duties thrown upon her by the indisposition of her parents. His gentle, unobtrusive virtues, like flowers that blow in the dark, seemed to develop themselves more kindly at this season of gloom, and Mary had never felt herself half so much attached to him as when he dropped the language of courtship, and merged the character of the lover in that of the friend, the comforter, and the adviser.

Amid gathering and ominous clouds did the term draw nigh which was to witness the nuptials of Mary, who used every means to withdraw her parents as much as possible from the observation of her lover, for, like all accomplices in crime, their mutual mistrust and fear of treachery had kindled into a bitter scorn and open hatred of each other. In spite of his wife's solemn assurance that she would adopt no steps of the fearful nature she had threatened, until after Mary's marriage, Lomax, suspecting that she would slip out, and betake herself to a magistrate, watched her every movement in an agony of apprehension, and could not bear her to be out of his sight, although they never met except to torment each other with menaces and recriminations.

His natural selfishness being aggravated by terror, the husband roused himself out of his sottish sloth, and made preparatory arrangements for absconding to America, and leaving

his daughter and wife to their fate ; a cruel and perfidious intention, which was accidentally detected by the latter, who warned him, with the bitterest upbraiding, that, if he persisted in his design, she would divulge his guilt to the whole world, and cause his instant apprehension.

Unhappy woman ! she knew not in this distressing emergency how to act, whither to turn ; nor had she any friend to whom she could apply for counsel, even if she could have sought advice, without betraying the fatal secret of her crime. Shattered by the combined assaults of distrust, hatred, remorse, and intense grief, her once powerful mind gave way with a rapidity accelerated by the unnatural state of tension in which it had so long been held. Several times had she stolen out in the night to throw herself upon her son's grave, whence she had been brought back weeping and sobbing, but without uttering a syllable, or oppo-

sing the least resistance to the wishes of her conductors.

Often she would wander to Benjamin's room, and, seating herself in a chair, would remain for hours in a seemingly unconscious stupor, twitching her fingers, and gazing with a fixed vacant look upon the bed in which he died. If aroused from this gloomy reverie, she would glare wildly or menacingly upon her disturber, and seek some other place, where she might again brood without interruption over her own sad thoughts.

Sometimes these gloomy moods were succeeded by fits of violence, in which she would stamp upon the floor, tear her hair, and rave and shriek with all the vehemence of a maniac. Nor was the alteration in her appearance less signal than the change which had been so quickly wrought in her mind. Not only had her commanding figure lost a portion of its height by a habit of stooping, but her dig-

nified carriage was exchanged for the equivocal and furtive deportment of the conscience-stricken culprit, who seeks concealment, and shrinks from every passing gaze: while the clear intellect that used to beam forth from her fine expressive features, like a mental sun, was succeeded by a wild or vacant eye, and a look of imbecility, when her face was not disturbed by the angrier paroxysms that gave it a phren-sied aspect.

Lomax had placed in attendance upon his wife a trusty nurse, who was strictly enjoined never to lose sight of her patient, and to lock her up at night, so as to prevent her stealing out of the house. Although her disease only wore the character of incipient aberration of mind, for she was generally in the full possession of her faculties, he thought that a physician might be found who would warrant her confinement in a private mad-house, a measure on which his whole heart was now set, since it

was the only one that promised him a full and permanent security.

From a well-watched prison of that nature she could not effect her escape, while her confessions and accusations would be either unheard or treated as the ravings of delirium. She, herself, when alarmed, at an earlier period, by her husband's somnambulism and his terrified exclamations about the will, or the tall thin man in the low-crowned hat, had weighed more than once how she might procure his confinement in a mad-house; so that she could not justly have reproached him, had she been aware of his present intentions. Thus is it that accomplices in crime are generally made the instruments of Providence for mutual torment, even when treachery on the one part or the other fails to call down the ever-impending sword of justice.

Darker thoughts, indeed, than any that we have stated, were at this moment lurking in

the mind of Lomax, who, coward as he was, would gladly have accomplished the death of his confederate, could it have been done without the possibility of detection. Let not the reader start at this averment. Nothing is so ruthless as the fear engendered by guilt, and rarely, indeed, does it stop at a single transgression. Every offence is pregnant with another, and each comes into the world accompanied by its avenger, for remorse is the twin of crime.

In her early career, Mrs. Lomax would have shuddered at the remotest contemplation of murder ; but we have seen how quickly after her first misdeed in the forgery of the will, she thought of strangling Diedrich Hoffman, when his apprehended recovery threatened her with exposure. Placed in nearly the same predicament, her husband could now meditate a similar enormity, from which he was only withheld by a dread of its discovery, and the hope of effecting his

object by the less perilous means of a madhouse. It was remarkable that his night-walkings, his ghastly visions, and his groundless panics, had recently left him. The greater terror had, in fact, swallowed up the less, and he required not to be haunted by any more appalling spectre than that of his wife making her confession before a magistrate and arraigning him as a felon.

Grimsby, the fanatical preacher, who had been for some time absent from London, happened to return at this juncture, and paid a visit to Cypress House. "What!" he exclaimed, as he beheld Mrs. Lomax, and noticed the fearful ravages of a few short months:—"What! have you not yet forgiven God Almighty?—are you still miserable for the loss of your son?"

"No; I am miserable because his mother is alive," was her reply, uttered in a stern and hollow voice. "I am miserable, wretched,

mad, because I can never hope to rejoin him when I die."

"That despairing thought is the suggestion of the evil spirit: cast it from you, or you will fall into the snares of Satan."

"Fall into his snares!" shouted the guilty woman. "Ha! ha! ha! what foolery is this? He has got my soul already: I feel him grasping it with his talons. Look, look! there he stands—do you not see him yonder, grinning, and mocking, and mowing at me?"

"Ha! is it so!" said Grimsby. "Did I not tell you that God would punish your idolatry by removing your idol, and draw you towards himself, by leaving you no prop or support upon earth. Did I not say that in your hour of darkness and trial I would revisit you, and endeavour to guide you heavenward? Behold, I am come to redeem my pledge."

"Guide me heavenward! guide me to those blissful mansions where *he*, the heart of my

heart, the life of my life, is abiding in glory ! Oh ! if it were now possible ! But, no—no—no !” and she shook her head despondingly — “Heaven is the abiding place of the innocent, not of such guilty wretches as I am !”

Grimsby, who was by no means deficient in penetration, saw that his companion was driven by a remorse of conscience to the very borders of despair, a state of mind with which it had often been his lot to combat, for he was in the habit of attending criminals ordered for execution, and had been so successful in administering spiritual intoxication, as to have sent off some of the vilest malefactors from the scaffold, enraptured with the conviction that they would ascend instantly to heaven, and not less certainly and immediately enjoy the celestial beatitudes than those who had never transgressed.

His fluent eloquence we have already noticed ; when he chose, he could drop the iron

sternness of his look and manner, and assume a persuasive, almost an ingratiating character, which was but too well calculated to assist the dangerous delusion of his doctrines. In almost daily interviews he impressed upon his willing auditress the utter depravity of human nature, the nullity of good works towards salvation, the powerlessness of the human will, the certainty of election and reprobation, and the impossibility of forfeiting grace. “If you are once of the elect,” he argued, “no sin can deprive you of heaven; if you are one of the rejected, no good works can avail towards salvation.”

“I was once innocent,” sighed Mrs. Lomax. “Oh! if I could only believe that I had ever been in a state of grace!”

A clue was now furnished to the fanatic, who plied his beguiling sophistries with such perseverance and effect, that his disciple eventually believed herself to be one of the elect. Had

her faculties possessed their pristine vigour, she could not have been thus cajoled and led astray ; but she had fallen into a state of comparative fatuity, which prepared her to adopt, with an unspeakable eagerness and transport, the delightful hopes now held forth to her.

The thought of enjoying a blissful immortality in the society of her beloved Benjamin, without making restitution or atonement upon earth, and therefore without compromising either herself, or her husband, or Mary, was too entrancing a temptation to be resisted. Incessantly did she brood over this delusion, and feed it by the perusal of such controversial works as were placed in her hands by Grimsby.

In the same proportion that these confirmed her errors, did they unfortunately tend to increase the wanderings and the unsoundness of her mind, which now began to harbour in secret a terrible and fatal purpose. Why should she

remain upon earth to be persecuted with misery and the perpetual apprehensions of discovery and exposure, when she might, as one of the elect, commit suicide without offence, and be instantly transported to the arms and embraces of her beloved son?

No sooner had this desperate project taken possession of her mind than she set about its accomplishment with the cunning and stealth that not unusually characterise a partial derangement. In spite of her now tranquil mood, her terrified and distrustful husband had not neglected any of his precautions, the nurse being still directed to watch her constantly by day, and to lock her chamber-door at night.

This constraint, when she first discovered it, threw her back into one of her violent moods. The idea of being coerced and made a prisoner by her husband, by her accomplice, by one whom she scorned for his pusillanimity,

and hated for his selfishness, was so intolerable, that, in the proud anger of the moment, her mind recovered its natural ascendancy, her face its commanding energy, and she threatened to break open the door, or throw herself from the window, unless she were allowed to confront her presumptuous jailor, and to wither the paltry wretch with a look of her intense contempt. This ebullition, however, passed away, and the thought of circumventing her enemies, for such she now considered both Lomax and the nurse, took entire possession of her mind.

Pretending to be smitten with a temporary delirium, she deprived her attendant of rest during a whole night and day, and, complaining of exhaustion, as the second night drew on, affected to sink into a profound slumber. Her companion, naturally a heavy sleeper, and now nearly worn out with fatigue, locked the door at the usual hour, put the key in her pocket,

and, throwing herself on a sofa, presently began to snore aloud. This was the signal for the watchful invalid, who arose noiselessly from her bed, and made it her first care to purloin the key, an object in which she succeeded without difficulty ; and a fortunate circumstance for the nurse, whose life, had she awoke and offered any resistance, would hardly have been safe from the calm desperation of her patient.

With the strange inconsistency of a disordered mind, Mrs. Lomax, instead of hurrying to make her escape, proceeded to her wardrobe, arrayed herself in her best attire, put rings upon her fingers and jewels in her hair ; now viewing herself in the glass with the assistance of a lamp, and now casting a glance at her sleeping companion, with the fell determination of attempting to strangle her, should her deep slumber be broken.

It was nearly midnight, when, being be-

comingly decked for the joyous meeting in heaven with her beloved son—such was the hallucination that now governed her actions—she took the lamp, gently unlocked the door, fastened it behind her, and stealthily began to descend the large old-fashioned staircase ; the flickering light scarcely sufficing to disperse the black shadows that hung closely around her, as if they would have arrested the mistress of the mansion, and have prevented the execution of her fatal project.

She had watched her husband so vigilantly as to have discovered where he secreted the key of the garden gate, which she presently found, and, opening the back door, passed out into the garden. Wet, gusty, and intensely dark, the night seemed to be well adapted to the desperate purpose upon which she was bent.

As she passed beneath the great cypress tree, its agitated boughs sent forth a rustling

moan, and her appearance at this moment was sufficiently strange, not to say spectral, to have appalled the stoutest spectator, had she been encountered by any human eye. From the fear that the noise of her shoes might betray her, she had discarded them, and strode furtively and on tiptoe along the wet walk, her mouth half open, her eyes fixed and staring, her haggard features animated with an expression of wild triumph, and her jewels sparkling, as the lamp threw its fitful light upon her face; while, at other moments, the upper portion of her form was enveloped in darkness, and nothing could be discerned but her bare feet as they moved inaudibly over the soaked and glistening gravel.

The garden gate was soon reached and opened, when she again took up the lamp, not considering, in the disordered state of her mind, that its rays were likely, by attracting observation, to reveal her purpose, and pre-

vent its execution. As she left the wall, a gust of wind blew it out, but she still held it before her, as if guided by its light, and thus, in deep darkness, hurried down a miry passage that led to the river.

From the lateness of the hour and the state of the weather, not a soul was stirring, and she had scarcely caught a sound but her own quick breathing, though even that was half suppressed, when she found herself at the extremity of a small jetty that projected a few yards into the stream. As she saw the waters of a high tide darkly gleaming beneath her feet, she clasped her hands together, cast a look of wild delight upon the black sky, and then, pronouncing the name of her son for the first time since his death, cried aloud, “ Benjamin ! my beloved Benjamin ! I am coming, I am coming !” with which words she threw herself headlong into the river !

The sullen waters flashed for an instant as

they opened to engulf her, and a wharf dog, startled by the noise, barked deeply and repeatedly; but no human ear had caught the sound, no hand was stretched forth to save her. Had the attempt been made, it would probably have been unavailing, for, when the wretched suicide rose, after a brief interval, to the surface, she merely pronounced once more the word “*Benjamin!*” and then, voluntarily sinking downwards with a stern desperation, compelled herself to die!

The body was found on the following day; and the coroner’s inquest, having learnt her previous state of mind, immediately returned a verdict of temporary insanity.

CHAPTER IX.

“ Oh me ! what thing on earth that all things breeds,
Might be the cause of so impatient plight ?
What fury, or what fiend with felon deeds,
Hath stirred up so mischievous despight ? ”

SPENSER.

THIS appalling suicide, occurring so quickly after the death of a brother to whom she was devotedly attached, would have completely overwhelmed Mary's heart, had she not possessed a strength of mind rarely found in union with so much gentleness and sensibility. The society, the support, and the affectionate sympathies, of her lover, whose happiness was now again deferred to an indefinite period, and her own moral energies, preserved her from sinking into

an absolute despondency, although they could neither dispel her melancholy, nor dissipate the dark misgivings which now haunted her with a more importunate obstinacy than ever. In general, she had no belief in omens and prognostics, no superstitious apprehension that “coming events cast their shadows before;” but two or three dreams of evil augury had saddened her heart with the notion that her marriage with Barlow would never take place, a misgiving of which her most strenuous efforts could not altogether disabuse her mind.

In addition to these various sources of annoyance, the lamentable state into which her father sunk immediately after the funeral of his wife agitated her with incessant alarms, and saddened her with the most poignant grief. It might have been surmised that the comparative security in which he was placed by the death of an accomplice, who had so frequently threatened to turn king’s evidence, would have tended to

diminish, if it could not banish, his fears, and to restore, in some degree, his equanimity. So far was this from being the case, that his prostration of mind and agonies of terror and remorse became infinitely more deplorable than ever.

Accustomed for many years to acknowledge the ascendancy of his spouse, he had leaned upon her for counsel and support in every emergency, so that the natural weakness of his faculties had been confirmed by the long habit of implicitly following her guidance. Latterly, indeed, he had been frightened into a temporary resistance of her authority, he had wrangled with her almost daily, he had even hated her with all the rancour of selfishness and fear; but he had never denied her talents, never doubted her courage, and even, in the midst of his alienation, had depended upon her as a champion whom nothing could daunt, should her indomitable energies be revived by the necessity of vindicating their common crime. But she was

gone ! the stimulus of her opposition was removed, he was now the sole depository of their fatal secret, and the very consciousness that every thing depended upon himself, that he was left without an adviser or confederate to combat the dreaded Edward Ruddock, completely unhinged and unbalanced a mind which had never possessed sufficient equipoise to support itself without assistance.

Always weak and irresolute, he was now generally unable to decide upon any thing, however trifling, or, if his state of suspense and vacillation became so intolerable as to drive him into some hasty resolution, he wanted courage to carry it into effect, and relapsed into his pristine indecision. Sometimes he recurred to his long-cherished design of absconding to America with all his property ; then, again, as he adverted to the baseness and cruelty of thus deserting Mary, and blasting all her prospects in life, he determined to wait until after her marriage,

before he adopted any one of the plans between which he was thus perpetually wavering and hesitating.

At this juncture, the panic fears by day and the spectral illusions of the night, from which he had enjoyed a temporary respite, again assailed him with a more astounding potency than ever. Beleaguered with ghastly terrors on every side, tormented by his outward senses, and still more keenly agonized by his conscience, when he turned inwards and sought counsel from his own trembling heart, the wretched man could find no other refuge than in the insensibility of intoxication ; and, in spite of all efforts to restrain him, he now became a confirmed, almost an incessant, drunkard. Wines being no longer sufficiently stimulating, he had recourse to pure brandy, indulging in copious drams, from his uprising in the morning, until he staggered back, in a state of insensibility, to his bed at night.

Not with impunity could he thus abuse and stupify his faculties. Rapid and total derangement of his health, together with temporary fits of hypochondriacism, alternating with moods of delirious violence, were the consequences of his excess; but the habit of sottishness had now become so uncontrollable, that if his unhappy daughter denied him access to ardent spirits he became perfectly outrageous, and with horrid imprecations and menaces compelled her to restore the fatal fluid, admitting its destructive tendencies, but vociferating that he was willing to purchase temporary oblivion, even at the expence of madness and death itself.

A violent cold, caught in one of his sleep-walkings, aggravated by neglect and the morbid state of his body, ended in an inflammation, which quickly assumed a threatening aspect, and ultimately baffled all the resources of medicine. His physician, availing himself of a temporary intermission of his patient's sufferings,

apprised him of his imminent danger, and recommended him, if he had any worldly affairs to settle, to arrange them without a moment's delay.

“What! is my recovery hopeless?” cried the panic-stricken wretch, starting up in his bed and staring at his companion with a look of horror. “I cannot die yet: I am not in a state to stand before the judgment-seat. I cannot and will not die until—”

He paused, for even in this extremity he dreaded to commit himself by avowing his guilty and unprepared state; and the physician, earnestly recommending him to make his peace with God, since he feared that he had only a short time to live, took his departure, promising to return in two or three hours.

In these two or three hours a terrible revulsion agonized the mind of Lomax. Sobered by pain and terror, he turned away with disgust from the intoxicating draughts which had hitherto

lulled his anguish ; while the flame of life, blazing with that unnatural brightness which sometimes precedes its extinction, imparted to his faculties a clearness of perception to which he had long been a stranger. Alas ! his eyes were unsealed only to be seared with darkness and desolation.

Tied to his bed as to a stake, remorse, anguish, and dread, baited him on every side, tearing his heart with their relentless fangs, while he was utterly unable to obtain respite or relief, in whatever direction he might seek it. Retrospect was intolerable ; to look forward was still more appalling ; there was no time to extenuate the guilt of the past by atonement, or to disarm the future of its terrors by repentance. His sensations told him that Death was hovering with uplifted dart above his head ; and, as his ordinary selfishness became superseded by despair, his thoughts reverted to his daughter, whose affectionate solicitude and attentions, during all his

recent trials, had penetrated his heart, obtuse as it had become.

“Poor girl! poor girl!” he murmured to himself. “She must not be left in total ignorance of the terrible perils that environ her. Should Edward Ruddock return and demand restitution, should a discovery be made, should she be totally unprepared for the disgrace and calamity that are even now, perhaps, ready to burst upon her defenceless head, the blow would fall upon her like a thunderbolt. Villain as I am, I cannot, must not, will not, leave her without apprising her of her danger, that she may at least be aware of its existence, even if she cannot repel it. She may secure the property, and fly to America — she may make a compromise with Ruddock — she may — Hah! these cruel spasms warn me to be quick. Mary! Mary! Mary!”

Quick as an embodied echo, his daughter replied by her instant presence to his call; but

the suddenness of her appearance seemed to scare her father, who gazed wildly around him, as if he had forgotten his purpose. Recovering his recollection, he bade her lock the door, and seat herself by his side, which she did accordingly; but it was still some time before he could summon courage to make the confession he intended.

Twice did the wretched man begin and stop short; at length, however, collecting his bewildered faculties, he said, in a hoarse whisper, “ Mary ! are you sure that we are quite—quite alone—that no one can hear us ? ”

An answer was given in the affirmative.

“ My dear child ! ” he resumed, “ I am dying—I must shortly leave you—I feel the cold iron hand of Death upon my heart — and, ere I am called away to answer for my misdeeds, I would at least make the only atonement that is left, by confessing them.”

“ Shall I send for a clergyman, dear father ?

I have repeatedly urged this request before, but you would never——”

“No, no, no!” interposed Lomax with an air of impatience. “To you, and to you alone, must the fatal secret be divulged. If there is time afterwards for a minister to pray for me, I could wish—but, alas! it is too late! I have been too heinous a transgressor. What hope, what mercy, can be left for *me*?—Mary! prepare yourself, my good, my dutiful, my affectionate child—prepare yourself to be startled, dismayed, horrified. Knowing the integrity of your principles, the purity of your heart, I foresee that you will be unspeakably shocked; but it is for your own sake that I make myself for ever as despicable in your eyes as I am in my own, and therefore you must endeavour not to hate my memory for what I am about to state.”

He paused; and, then speaking with a nervous rapidity, as if he would huddle over his hu-

miliating confession as concisely as possible, he continued :—

“ Mary ! I am a culprit, a criminal, a felon ! The large fortune we possess was obtained by an infamous fraud. Hoffman had left the whole of it to his nephew, Edward Ruddock, but, at the instigation of your mother — who wanted, however, to enrich her beloved Benjamin, rather than herself, or me, or you — I forged a new will in my own favour, and defrauded the rightful heir ! ”

“ Forged a will ! ” shrieked the daughter, starting from her seat, and striking her hands violently together, while her countenance expressed an agony of consternation and amazement ; “ forged a will ! —O God ! my latent misgivings, and your own prelude to the announcement, had prepared me for some deed of darkness, but never, never did I anticipate anything half so horrible as this ! We are lost, utterly lost ! ” And she again clasped her hands,

and sunk down upon her seat in all the abandonment of despair.

“ Let us hope not,” cried Lomax, startled at the vehemence of her anguish. “ *I* indeed am lost, lost beyond redemption ; but you are no participant in this hideous crime, you are innocent of all offence, and I trust that you may still escape all the consequences of my transgression. That I have been suspected I cannot doubt, or I should not have been so dogged and haunted by that accursed tall thin man in the low-crowned hat who — hah ! — look, look !—he is there, standing against the wall !—Save me—save me ! Thrust him forth, fell him, kill him, or I shall go mad with terror !”

A cold perspiration burst from his brow, and he shrunk, trembling all over, beneath the bedclothes ; while Mary, who was accustomed to these phantom creations of his fear, and had seen, by the direction of his eyes, the cause of his present alarm, removed the black coat which he

himself had hung upon a peg, in a corner of the chamber.

Humouring his delusion — the most effectual means, as she had found by experience, for dispelling it — she assured him that his enemy had fled from the room, a fact which her miserable parent verified by a stealthy and timid glance around the apartment; when he drew a deep inspiration, and continued, “ So, I can breathe again, now I am no longer haunted by that menacing spectre with his basilisk eye, that seems to look through my very heart. Is he out of hearing, gone, fled ? Well, then, what did he witness after all, that you should be afraid of him when I am gone ? He saw me in the dead of night, committing a paper to the flames, but he knew not its nature, its contents, and I defy him to prove that it was the genuine will. Edward Ruddock, when we last heard tidings of him, was confined to his bed by a dangerous malady. Let us hope that he died of

it—no improbable supposition, since he has not returned to England as he had intended. But, even if he appear, he may not suspect the wrong that has been done him ; he may never claim his inheritance, and even if he should— now mark me well, dear Mary, for I wish to put you in possession of all the circumstances, that you may be the better enabled to make your defence and to defeat him—even if he should institute proceedings against you, and contest the validity of the will, how can he prove his case ? The signatures were genuine ; although the will was in my hand-writing, and no eye save that of your mother, who has carried the dread secret with her to the grave, saw me commit the forgery.”

“ Yes, father, yes ! ” exclaimed Mary, speaking with an emphatic solemnity, and laying her hand upon her parent’s arm, “ there was another eye that witnessed the whole transaction.”

“ Ha ! — how — what ! Whose — whose ? ”

shouted Lomax, as he suddenly started up in his bed.

“The eye of God !” replied Mary, casting her looks reverently downwards.

A long shuddering groan escaped from the bosom of her guilty parent, who again cowered beneath the bed-clothes, as if to hide himself, hoarsely whispering, “It is too true ! it is too true ! I am indeed a lost and guilty wretch ! God has seen, and God will punish my transgression !”

There was a silence of several minutes, for the voice of Lomax was stifled in despair, and the emotions that tore the bosom of Mary, too distressful for utterance, were only to be gathered from her gestures. With an expression of the most poignant anguish, she cast her eyes appealingly upwards, as if imploring mercy for her father, repeatedly clasped her hands together, shook her head as if in utter hopelessness, compressed her lips in the vain attempt to check her

tears, and at length suffered them to flow down her face without restraint.

“Do not, do not weep, my dear child !” said Lomax, when he again ventured to look at her ; “it is fit that I should suffer, for I am a sinner of no common turpitude ; but you, who are so good, so pure, whose whole life has been a strict and unbroken performance of every duty—O Mary ! I cannot, cannot bear to see *you* in such deep affliction. Cheer up, then, my child—for all may yet go well, so far, at least, as *you* are concerned—and pay attention to my dying request—it is my last wish, my most earnest entreaty, nay, my command, that your nuptials should take place as soon after my decease as propriety will allow ; for, should Ruddock return to England, or any discovery be made, it will be of infinitely less consequence to you when you are no longer solitary and defenceless, but provided with a protector by your marriage with Barlow.”

“ Marriage with Barlow !” vehemently exclaimed Mary, giving impetuous utterance to the bitter reflections over which she had been brooding ; “ marriage with Barlow ! away, away for ever with the dishonest, the nefarious thought ! As surely as I am now sitting by your side, this hidden crime will be discovered ; it must, it must !—it will be divulged, made manifest, published to all the world ; and, believing this as firmly as I do my own existence, think you that I would be base and fraudulent enough to give my hand to Evelyn Barlow ? What ! shall I suffer him to marry the daughter of a felon ?—shall I expose the man I love above all others to a life-long misery and disgrace which I would not heap upon my bitterest enemy ? Shall I subject him to the ignominy of a public trial, and the compulsory restitution of my fortune ? Shall I knowingly, basely, treacherously, inflict a wife upon him with whom he could never walk abroad without being pointed at by the uplifted finger

of Scorn ? O no, no, no ! I would rather die ten thousand deaths. How I shall act, how explain to him my motives, how break off our engagement, I know not; for I am stunned, bewildered by this terrible revelation: but on one point my mind is already made up, inflexibly and definitively—I cannot and will not perpetrate such a cruel and unwarrantable fraud as to marry Mr. Barlow."

"I did not advert to this—it never occurred to me," said Lomax; "but, knowing your high principles, and the decision of your character, I now see it all. Too clearly do I now perceive the fatal consequences of my confession. Would to Heaven that I had never made it ! O God ! how terribly, and yet how justly, have I and my wretched accomplice been punished for our crime ! The dear boy, for whose sake chiefly it was committed, was snatched away from us by a premature death. Not a single hour of peace, not a single respite from remorse and fear, did

either of his parents enjoy after the day of their transgression. One has terminated her miserable career by suicide ; and I, wretch that I am, I am dying amid bodily and mental anguish, with the additional pang of knowing that I have destroyed the happiness of, and entailed probable disgrace and poverty upon, a beloved daughter, the sole survivor of our family. If these are the consequences, even of a successful and undiscovered crime, oh ! how sharp, how intolerable, must be the agony of that which is exposed and punished ! ”

Mary made no reply, for she was oppressed with sad thoughts ; and, feeling the truth of what her father had just uttered, she knew not what to say, nor how to offer him a single word of consolation. Lomax, too, sunk into a desponding reverie ; his thoughts were upon his daughter. Adverting to her painful and impassioned declaration on the subject of her marriage, he gave way to an unusual burst of tenderness and ruth ;

and, melting into tears as he extended his hand, he exclaimed in a broken voice, “ My child, my child ! I feel that I have been your most remorseless enemy ; you will have reason to curse my memory ; but I meant it not ; I am dying—will you, can you forgive me ? ”

“ O my dear father ! ” cried Mary, seizing his hand and pressing it to her heart, “ it is I who should implore pardon for an ebullition which I fear you have construed into a reproach. I knew not what I was saying—my feelings overcame me. Alas ! what are my sufferings and prospects compared to your’s, that I should so selfishly have intruded them upon your attention ? Not from me, not from me, but from a justly-offended Deity, should you supplicate pardon and mercy. Oh ! let us not any longer delay this all-important duty. Let me, let me, send instantly for a clergyman.”

“ No, I cannot bear a stranger to come near me. He will interrogate me, and pry into my

secret. But you can kneel down and pray for me, dear Mary. Your intercessions, my innocent and injured child, may perhaps be heard. As for me, desperate as is my need, I dare not implore remission of my sins."

In obedience to the wishes of her father, Mary threw herself upon her knees by the bed-side, and, trusting to the spontaneous eloquence inspired by deep feeling, besought the forgiveness of Heaven for the dying penitent. As Lomax gazed upon the pallid features of his daughter, rendered still more wan by the deep mourning in which she was arrayed, as he marked the trembling of her clasped hands, the suffusion of her upturned eyes, and listened to the vehement earnestness of her appealing voice, the deep agony of his soul seemed for a moment to be allayed.

But this respite was of brief duration. After a short interval his pains returned, a paroxysm of dismay succeeded to the calm, and he

abandoned himself to all the horrors of despair. Scenes of anguish and remorse, unaccompanied by any circumstance that may mitigate their painfulness, or appeal to the sympathies of the reader, we have never deemed fit subjects for the pen of the novelist.

Willingly, therefore, do we draw the curtain around the death-bed of Lomax. Ere the morning sun arose, he was a corpse !

CHAPTER X.

— “ Think upon my grief,
And on the justice of my flying hence,
To keep me from a most unholy match.”

SHAKSPEARE.

RARELY, perhaps, in the history of human calamity, had a young and orphaned female been assailed by a more harrowing combination of trials and distresses than those with which Mary Lomax was now doomed to contend. The loss of a beloved brother, the quickly succeeding death of both her parents under circumstances so awful and appalling, the dreadful, the humiliating secret bequeathed by them, and the probable disgrace and desti-

tution to which it would expose her, were sufficiently overwhelming, without the addition of the acute anguish, and the disappointment of all her hopes, involved in the inevitable annulment of her marriage with Barlow.

Having fully made up her mind to the necessity of this heart-breaking measure, she wished, if possible, to avoid all communication with him until she should have decided upon her course of action, and fixed the time and mode for acquainting him with her resolves. With this view she confined herself to her own room, stating, as was indeed most true, that she was too ill and too much distressed to support a conversation.

Barlow, in the mean time, with his usual delicacy and attention, took upon himself all the arrangements of the funeral, which he attended in person, and subsequently gave such directions to the household as he thought would be most acceptable to his betrothed

mistress, and best calculated to save her from every painful application or exertion.

Stunned and astounded as she had been at first, Mary obtained leisure, in this most distressing interval, to rally a little from the effects of the visitation that had fallen upon her, and to summon her energies to her aid.

Her naturally strong mind seemed to be invigorated by the necessity for exertion ; and, although her heart was wrung, tortured, lacerated to its very core, she never faltered for a single moment, when she had ultimately decided what course to adopt. The more she reflected, the more deeply rooted became her conviction that she was imperatively bound to separate herself from Barlow, at once and for ever.

Upon this subject her first resolution and her last were identical. To delude him into marriage and into ultimate misery and disgrace, by a fraudulent suppression of the truth,

was entirely out of the question ; she had no right, by divulging the secret, to render the memory of her parents infamous ; and even if she hazarded this perilous measure, what reason had she to suppose that it would reconcile him to a match so likely to terminate in exposure and disgrace ? Nay, if his generosity, his compassion, or his reckless affection, should prompt him to claim her hand, in defiance of all these perils and determents, it only placed her under a more binding obligation to prevent so frightful a sacrifice, and to save him from the consequences of his own temerity. That no time should be lost in apprising him of a resolution which would so materially influence his whole future life, and so completely alter all his present arrangements, she felt fully aware ; and yet it was not until after the lapse of several days that she could collect strength and courage enough to indite the following letter :—

“ My dear Friend !

“ With a frame debilitated by sleeplessness and ill-health, with a bleeding and almost broken heart, I am called upon to discharge a duty of the most distressing nature, a duty rendered still more agonising by the consciousness that it will both afflict and affront you, without my having the power to explain the motives of my conduct, and the stern, the inexorable necessity under which I am acting.

“ O, Mr. Barlow ! all our fond vows must be recalled, all our prospects of mutual happiness are gone for ever, our engagement must be instantly and definitively broken off—I can never, never, never be your wife ! A disclosure of the most harrowing description, made to me by my father upon his death-bed, has placed an insuperable bar between us. Ask me not its nature ; it is an impenetrable secret. If you knew it, you would be the first to approve my inflexible resolution, the first to thank

Heaven that its providential revelation prevented an union which might have been the curse of your whole future life.

“ Alas ! what a hard, what a cruel fate is mine ! I am innocent of all offence ; my affections are unaltered ; and yet, from the unhappy mystery of my position, I am doomed to appear capricious, heartless, nay perhaps treacherous and hateful in your eyes. By the love which you once professed for me, and which it is still my pride to have merited, I implore you to judge me in charity and mercy. Trample not upon the fallen, crush not a bruised heart. Most solemnly can I declare that your recent attentions and kindness have endeared you to me more than ever : I call Heaven to witness, that, in thus suddenly breaking our betrothed bonds, and flying, as I am about to do, from London, I am solely actuated by a paramount sense of honour and justice, solely anxious to avert future misery and humiliation from one

whose happiness is infinitely more dear to me than my own.

“ Farewell, farewell for ever ! When you think of me, let it be with pity and with pardon. Better would it be, however, that you should forget me altogether, by transferring your affections to some other, who, while she appreciates the value of your attachment not less fully than myself, may be at liberty to reciprocate it — a privilege which can never be enjoyed by

“ Your ill-fated friend,

“ MARY LOMAX.”

For the delay in writing and transmitting this letter there were other and most cogent reasons, besides the state of her bodily and mental health. Struck by the singular resemblance of her fate to that of Helen, although the sudden infraction of her intended marriage proceeded from so different a cause, she re-

solved to imitate the example of that judicious friend, by flying, as quickly as possible, from her discarded lover.

Without benefiting either party, an interview, she felt assured, must be unspeakably painful to both. In the agitation of the moment, and her natural anxiety to acquit herself from any charge of perfidy or inconstancy, she might be tempted to divulge more than she ought of the fatal secret; she could not endure the thought of listening to Barlow's reproaches, without the power of repelling them; and no arguments, no persuasions, no offers, could make her swerve from her rooted purpose. She would fly, therefore, without seeing him; but much, much was to be accomplished before she could carry her purpose into execution.

Her father had died intestate. Abhorring the very name of a will, since it recalled his crime and the miseries it had entailed, no

power on earth could have forced him to prepare and sign any such instrument — a repugnance which he had little occasion to conquer, as he had no relation in the world but Mary, who succeeded, as a matter of course, to all his property.

The legal proceedings necessary to establish this claim occasioned a delay of several days, and, before she would trust herself to the hazards of a journey, she thought it her duty to make her will.

From the first moment when her father had stung her ear by the tidings of his guilt, she had resolved to restore to the rightful proprietor every shilling that was left of the fortune wrested from him : and, not knowing at present how or where to find him, she determined to secure this purpose, in the event of her own death, by naming him her sole heir.

Having made these arrangements, she left London, accompanied by her maid, on the very

day when her letter was placed in the hands of Barlow. So profound was his amazement as he perused it, that for some time he distrusted the evidence of his senses, and read it over and over in increasing bewilderment, without arriving at any other conclusion than that the whole was an inexplicable enigma. The handwriting, indeed, was Mary's; of that he could entertain no doubt; but the resolution it announced, utterly opposed as it was to all her previous sentiments and actions, completely astounded him.

In the hope of obtaining some solution of the mystery, he hurried to Cypress House, resolved to demand an interview and an explanation. Mary had left it some hours before, announcing her intention never to return; nor could he obtain the smallest clue as to the direction of her flight, for, in the desire to cut off all unavailing correspondence and expostulation, she had used such precautions on

quitting London, that it became impossible to track her course.

Baffled in every attempt of this nature, the disconcerted Barlow hastened to communicate the strange tidings to his father, who, instead of condoling with him as he had expected, openly expressed his delight at the intelligence. Upright and honourable in his principles, and warmly attached to his son, the old gentleman would never have interfered with an engagement which had advanced so far towards completion ; but many recent occurrences had combined to make him deeply regret that it had ever been formed. The mystery and the fatality that had latterly lowered over the whole Lomax family, the quarrels of the parents, the suicide of the mother, the low sottishness of the father, and the suspected mental derangement of both parties, constituted an array of objections which had recently awakened in his mind an utter aversion from the marriage.

"Give you joy, my dear boy!" he exclaimed, heartily shaking his son's hand; "depend upon it, this is the luckiest turn you ever had, or will have. In no other way could you have got handsomely out of the scrape; but now the girl comes forward and thrusts you out of it, whether you will or no, so that you cannot help yourself; and God forbid that you should ever attempt to renew the engagement! Tush, man! don't look so downcast; this ought to be the happiest day of your life. It is of mine, I can tell you."

"But what is your interpretation of this mysterious letter?" inquired the son.

"I am no guesser of riddles, Evelyn, but a plain man of the world; and my notion of the matter is this: when the girl first agreed to have you, her brother and her parents were alive. They are now dead — she finds herself unexpectedly the sole possessor of a large fortune, and she thinks, no doubt, that

she may do better than marry a shipbuilder's son."

"On my life, sir, you do her injustice," exclaimed Evelyn with some warmth; "a less ambitious or sordid girl I never knew. Mary is incapable of any thing so ungenerous, so base. Inscrutable as they may seem, I am confident that her motives are good."

"Disclosure of the most painful description," muttered the father, poring over the letter for the second time—"insuperable bar—'curse of your whole future life'—'innocent of all offence'—why, where are your eyes, boy? The meaning of the whole matter is clear enough. Her father has confessed to her on his death-bed, probably under a solemn injunction of secrecy, that there is hereditary madness in the family; and, like a good girl, and a wise girl, and an honest girl, and an innocent girl, for such she is, after all, she will not, with the knowledge of this '*insuperable bar*,' hold

you to your bargain. I have suspected as much for some time past, and I fear that the infirmity is on both sides. The mother was mad, or she wouldn't have drowned herself: the father was mad, or he wouldn't have walked in his sleep, and wandered about in the day-time, starting at nothing, and muttering gibberish to himself. Benjamin was never like any other boy; if he had lived, he would probably have found his way to Bedlam: and there must be something odd and wild about the girl herself—perhaps she already feels a touch of the family malady—or she would never abscond from her home in this mysterious way, only accompanied by her maid, and rambling about the world, the Lord knows why or whither. This being the case, and there can hardly be a doubt upon the subject, you cannot do better than take her advice—forget her altogether, and look about you for some other girl, who may be as engaging as Mary Lomax—for I

don't deny her attractions—without being descended from crazy and suicidal parents."

In the impossibility of obtaining any other satisfactory clue to the meaning of the letter, Evelyn, after again carefully perusing it, was reluctantly compelled to adopt his father's solution, which, however painful, brought with it one redeeming consideration ; it justified Mary's conduct—it absolved her from all blame — it confirmed her averment that he would be the first to approve her resolution, the first to thank Heaven that their nuptials had been prevented. Coinciding in the inevitable necessity for this severance, and the propriety of her departure from London, he felt that she had decided rightly in concealing the place of her retreat, so as to cut off at once, and for ever, all communication between them. Under these painful circumstances, he had no alternative but to yield to the decree of fate—to bear the disappointment of his hopes with as much for-

titude as possible, and to trust that change of scene, and the healing influences of time, would remove the deep dejection that now oppressed his heart.

Mary Lomax, not knowing in what other direction to betake herself, had determined to seek refuge with Helen Owen, until she should be enabled to decide upon her future plans. In the hurry and anxiety of her departure from London, she had omitted to apprise her of her intention, so that the surprise of her friend, when, on her arrival at Ilfracombe, which was now the place of Helen's residence, she proceeded to her house, and threw herself into her arms, may be more easily imagined than described.

"My dear Helen!" exclaimed the traveller, after the first flurry of greeting and inquiry had somewhat subsided, "I come to claim your friendship and assistance in a predicament so extremely delicate and painful, that I hesitated

for some time before I could make up my mind to intrude upon your retreat ; but I said to myself, if the cases were reversed — if Helen were in my place, and I in her's — how should I act ? My heart told me that I should receive you with joy, and I did not therefore hesitate another moment in directing my flight hither, concluding that your's would equally sympathize with a friend in distress."

" Thank you, thank you, my dear Mary ! " exclaimed Helen, affectionately pressing her to her heart ; " you have decided in a manner worthy of yourself, and most flattering to me. Oh ! how delighted am I to see you once more, though I little expected it so soon after the late melancholy occurrences."

" Alas, dear Helen ! I have known nothing but melancholy occurrences — nothing but losses, calamities, and horrors, since last we parted. Let me hasten to apprise you of the total change in my situation and prospects.

That I am an orphan you already know; but you have yet to learn that ere long I may be penniless—absolutely destitute.”

“ Penniless ! destitute !—but Mr. Barlow is wealthy, and your marriage—”

“ It will never, never, take place ! ” interposed Mary in a broken voice, and with suffused eyes. “ All is over ! I have put an end to it, broken it off; but not for any fault on the part of Mr. Barlow, who is every thing that is amiable and excellent.”

“ Good heavens ! do I hear you, do I understand you rightly ? What possible motive can have driven you to such a painful, such an incomprehensible, proceeding ? ”

“ *That* is a secret which must for ever remain locked up in my own bosom ; and before I can consent to remain here, even for another day, you must solemnly promise that you will never attempt to penetrate the mystery. Forgive me for thus dictating conditions, when I come as a

suitor, but my peace of mind requires it — a cruel necessity drives me on — I cannot help myself."

"I am too glad to have you upon any terms, my dear friend, not to give you the promise you require. Upon this interdicted subject I swear to you that my lips shall be perpetually sealed."

"Thank you, thank you a thousand times," ejaculated Mary. "Perhaps I may not long be a restraint upon your curiosity, or a burthen upon your friendship, for I only purpose to remain here until I shall be enabled to settle my future proceedings."

"And why should not your plan embrace a permanent residence at Ilfracombe, beneath the roof that now covers us? There is so marked, so marvellous, a similarity in our fates, at least upon *one* point, and there must be so close a sympathy in our feelings, that, having been fortunately thrown together, we ought never to

think of parting. It would really seem as if my good angel had led you higher, that, by taking compassion on me so far as to become my constant companion and friend, you might supply the loss of my dear Rose.”

Mary made a suitable reply to this affectionate speech, and then endeavoured to turn the conversation to less painful and exciting subjects ; but she was unable to maintain it long. Exhausted by the fatigue of her journey and the agitation of her mind, she was fain to wish her friend good night at an unusually early hour, and to retire to rest.

It was her first care, when the delicate attentions of Helen had reconciled her to her new residence, and in some degree restored her equanimity, to write to Dr. H—— at Bristol, inquiring whether he could give her any tidings of Edward Ruddock, as she had something of the greatest importance to communicate to him.

In his reply, the Doctor stated that the object of her inquiry, after having recovered from the dangerous fever with which he had been attacked at Buenos Ayres, had abandoned his intention of returning to Europe, and had penetrated into the interior of the country, on a commercial expedition, since which time he had not been heard of. The Doctor added that Ruddock had been long ago apprized of the nature of his late uncle's will, for that he had procured a copy to be taken in London, and had forwarded it to him. The agent employed for this purpose happened to be a tall thin man in a low-crowned hat, an accidental coincidence, which, as it will be recollected, had almost scared Lomax out of his wits, on his visit to Doctors' Commons.

Delighted to find that Ruddock was still living and restored to health, Mary not only caused advertisements to be inserted in a variety of newspapers, offering a handsome re-

ward to any one who could give intelligence concerning him, but, through the medium of her solicitor in London, despatched a special agent to Buenos Ayres, expressly commissioned to find him out, and provided with ample funds to assist him in his researches, as well as with a letter which revealed enough of the truth, although in guarded terms, to ensure the immediate return of Ruddock to England.

Having satisfied her conscience by the adoption of every measure that seemed calculated to attain the great design on which her mind was fixed, Mary was at leisure to struggle with her many griefs, and to tranquillize her heart, an object not less assisted by the romantic beauties of the neighbouring scenery, for she had ever been a passionate admirer of nature, than by the delightful society and soothing cares of her friend.

Helen, whose temperament was naturally buoyant and vivacious, had now attained a

moderate but equable cheerfulness, a frame of mind more conducive to happiness than the exuberant spirits in which she had heretofore indulged, and which were not seldom followed by a proportionate exhaustion. While Mary's griefs were fresh and poignant, she condoled with her, read appropriate books to her, and accompanied her in little excursions to the most picturesque spots in the vicinity, until she had gradually weaned her from the contemplation of her sorrows : and, when her tone of mind became sufficiently invigorated to sympathize with livelier sallies, Helen gave a loose to her constitutional sprightliness, and put forth all those powers of amusement with which she was so eminently gifted.

Though they had been subjected to sore trials and heart-withering disappointments, both parties possessed the inappreciable blessing of an unaccusing conscience ; both could look back on their past conduct not only with com-

placency, but with an honest pride ; and, as their minds were not less vigorous than pure, they would have deemed it an ingratitude to Heaven, had they abandoned themselves to an unavailing regret or despondency.

Time rolled on without bringing any tidings of Ruddock ; and, at the end of two years, unmarked by any other occurrence than the closer cementation of their mutual friendship, from a more intimate knowledge and longer experience of one another's virtues, both had pretty well resumed their characteristic frame of mind, which was marked in Mary by a placid sedateness, and in her friend by an habitual cheerfulness, easily exalted into gaiety and mirth

CHAPTER XI.

— “ She, like a moon in wane,
Faded before him, coward, nor could restrain
Her fearful sobs, self-folding, like a flower,
That faints into itself at evening hour.”

KEATS.

As a proof of her complete conquest over her ill-fated passion, and of the calm self-possession to which Mary was by this time restored, we may state that, when she read in a newspaper the announcement of Evelyn Barlow's marriage with a girl of whose amiability and accomplishments she remembered to have heard honourable mention, the intelligence only occasioned a slight throbbing of her heart, and she was enabled to retire to her own chamber

and to pray for his happiness with a firm and unbroken voice.

In after-years it was a consolation to her to learn that he was enjoying, from his union with another, an unalloyed felicity which her own untoward fate might possibly have converted into a life of the most humiliating vexation, had he prosecuted his alliance with herself.

A few days after the fact of Barlow's nuptials had been made known to her, Mary was disagreeably surprised by a visit from Grimsby, the itinerant preacher, whose doctrines had operated with so sinister an effect on the mind of her unfortunate mother. Some recent mal-practices having been discovered by the leaders of the religious community to which he had attached himself, he was instantly discarded from their pale, a fact which he carefully suppressed on the present occasion, representing himself as enjoying high favour, and in expectation of a permanent and profitable appoint-

ment to a chapel in London. Having lately learnt the death of her father, Grimsby had ferreted out the address of the rich heiress, and had travelled to Ilfracombe with the intention of obtaining her favour, and offering himself as a substitute for the discarded Barlow.

Hopeless, and even preposterous as such a project may appear, it did not present itself to Grimsby as being surrounded with any insurmountable difficulties, for it fell within his cognizance that obscure and unattractive preachers of his own persuasion had achieved matches not less advantageous than that which he was contemplating.

Rendered reckless by his desperate circumstances, since he was now doomed to begin the world afresh, without either means or character, he thought the enterprise was, at all events, well worth a trial. If it succeeded, he was made for life, elevated beyond the most aspiring

dreams of his ambition ; if it failed, his want of success could not place him in a worse position than he now occupied. He had nothing to lose, every thing to win.

Quickened by these arguments, and by the sharp spur of necessity, he became an almost daily visitant to Mary, arraying himself in his best attire, brightening his lurid countenance with a leering smile, assuming a most significant tenderness of tone, and addressing his conversational powers, in which he was by no means deficient, to such subjects as he thought most likely to ingratiate himself with the young heiress.

Helen, instantly penetrating his design, visited it with unmeasured ridicule, and took little pains to conceal from Grimsby that she considered his intrusion upon their retreat an impertinent liberty. Not so the gentle Mary, whose dislike was repressed by an habitual courtesy, and a disinclination to hurt

the feelings of a man who had been the friend and guest of her parents, and had hitherto given her no real ground of offence, for she did not believe that he entertained any serious thoughts of offering her his hand.

Grimsby, naturally sanguine and arrogant, construed her forbearance into encouragement, and in a few days declared himself her lover, reminding her of her unprotected situation, and urging the prudence of her contracting a respectable marriage, as a defence against the sharpers and adventurers with whom she was sure to be besieged.

Provoked out of her usual placidity, Mary gave such a peremptory and indignant rejection to his suit, that his wrath was kindled, and he had the audacity to recommend a reconsideration of her verdict, since his mind was made up to have her, and he was not to be disappointed, and still less offended with impunity. In answer to this insolence she rang the

bell for the footman, when her unmanly menacer hurried out of the room, muttering indistinct threats, while his dark saturnine features were inflamed with anger.

Grimsby had, in one respect, spoken the truth : he was not a man to overlook an affront at any time, and least of all at the present moment, when his temper was soured, and his circumstances desperate. Determined to make or to mar his fortunes for ever, he resolved to carry off the heiress by force, not doubting that, if he could convey her to Scotland, she would consent to marry him, (especially if he could make it appear that she had been a willing fugitive) rather than return to Ilfracombe with a blemished reputation.

For the execution of this nefarious project the sea offered him tempting facilities, and his active mind lost no time in devizing a plan likely to be attended with success. The two friends had recently been in the habit of taking

an evening ride to some of the Tors or hills in the neighbourhood. Helen, however, being confined to the house by a slight indisposition, Mary had been fain for the last few days to make her favourite excursion with no other companion than an old groom, a remarkably trustworthy person, as she believed, and a more than sufficient protection in that quiet and secluded part of the country. Accident possessed Grimsby with the fact that this man had formerly been imprisoned for a misdemeanour, and was by no means a reclaimed character, though he affected a particular starchness and steadiness in his present occupation.

The display of twenty guineas, of which at this juncture there were very few in circulation, and the promise of the horses belonging to his mistress, soon won him over to be his accomplice in the meditated outrage, which was represented to him as of trivial importance, since it was to terminate in marriage. Having thus

secured a confederate, who might otherwise have frustrated his whole scheme, Grimsby proceeded to engage a small skiff to carry him to Scotland, stating to the captain that he had discovered his wife at Ilfracombe, who had eloped from him with a lover some weeks before, and that he was anxious to convey her away in such a manner as that her paramour should be unable to track her.

These arrangements being made, no time was lost in the execution of the plot. On returning homewards from her ride, and approaching a spot only separated from the sea-shore by a bank, Mary was surprised at finding hurdles fixed across the road. She drew up, and the knavish groom, pretending to be not less amazed than his mistress, alighted for the ostensible purpose of removing the obstruction ; when Grimsby, as it had been preconcerted, leaped from the other side of the bank, snatched Mary from her horse, clambered hastily over

the mound, and bore her off in his powerful arms to a boat that was in waiting ; while his accomplice rode across the country, intending to embark for Ireland with the horses, which were to be the further reward of his villainy.

So rapidly had all this been accomplished, that Mary, paralysed and aghast, had neither offered resistance, nor even attempted to call for aid ; but as her bewildered faculties returned, she shrieked aloud, when the ruffian stopped her cries with a handkerchief, and bade her be silent as she valued her life. The sound of his hated voice, and a glimpse of his features, hardened into an expression of fixed desperation, revealed to his victim the nature and the extent of her danger ; but her energies abandoned her when she had most need of their exertion, and, after a short struggle, she uttered a deep sigh, closed her eyes, and sunk back upon his shoulder, overcome with faintness.

"This is fortunate," said Grimsby, as he laid her on the stern of the boat; "we shall now have no resistance, no noise, and no trouble. Look!" he continued, pointing to the speeding groom, "see how her paramour flies from the just vengeance of an offended husband. Now, boatman, quick, quick. Give me one of the oars, and let us pull away for the skiff. She ought to have been moored closer in."

With these words he pulled lustily from the shore, but had scarcely rowed twenty yards, when, upon looking ahead, he exclaimed:—"Avast, comrade, avast! let us lay upon our oars, until yonder boat which is crossing our track has cleared us;" and as he said this he threw part of a tarpaulin over Mary so as nearly to conceal her body.

The fresh air of the sea had already partially revived her, and the fall of this heavy covering assisting to restore her consciousness, she

opened her eyes, and obtained a glance of the approaching boat, in which she was delighted to perceive a lady and children. Fortunately, she had sufficient presence of mind to remain silent and motionless until it drew near, when, rallying all her energies, she suddenly started up, and extending both her arms, screamed as loudly as she could :—“ Help ! — help ! for God’s sake, help me ! ” and continued her outcries, even after the savage Grimsby had ferociously thrust her down in the boat, and again thrown the tarpaulin over her.

“ Villain ! ” cried a man’s voice from the opposite boat, which was instantly steered down upon them, “ what is the meaning of this cowardly, this unmanly cruelty to a woman ? ”

“ Keep aloof ! or you are a dead man ! ” roared Grimsby in a tone of fury. “ This guilty creature is my wife, and, if you attempt to interfere between us, I swear by Heaven that

I will beat you into the water, or dash your brains out!"

" 'Tis false!" shrieked Mary; "the ruffian is bearing me off from my friends. Save, oh save me, as you are men and christians!"

The boats were now nearly in contact, and Grimsby, seeing that the stranger who had previously spoken was evidently determined to arrest his progress, and rescue his victim, made such a furious but ineffectual blow at him with a heavy boat-hook, that he overreached himself in the effort, fell forward, struck his forehead with a stunning violence against the opposite gunwale, tumbled into the sea, and instantly sunk never to rise again!

At the very instant of this catastrophe, Mary again started up, and jumped with a convulsive spring into the other boat. Overcome by the exertion she had made, and the joy of finding herself in the arms of a lady, who tenderly embraced and congratulated her

upon her escape, she burst for a moment into an hysterical laugh, and then, sinking down, relapsed into insensibility.

“Lie to,” said the stranger to his men:—“keep a sharp look-out, and let us see whether we cannot pick up this good-for-nothing rascalion. I would not have him perish, though he would certainly have knocked my brains out had I not avoided the blow. Pull ahead, sirrah! and search for your comrade.”

The latter words were addressed to Grimsby’s boatman, who, not liking the complexion of the affair, left his employer to his fate, and made the best of his way to rejoin the skiff; while the stranger, after lying to for some time, concluded, as was, indeed, the case, that the perpetrator of the outrage, disabled by the concussion he had received in falling, had been prevented from making the least exertion to save himself, and had perished. The rowers were, accordingly, ordered to proceed to the

harbour, on reaching which Mary had so far recovered that she was able to walk to her residence, supported on either side by her deliverers, whom she found by their conversation to be husband and wife. Here they quitted her to attend to their children, promising to return in an hour to inquire after her health.

Through the good offices of Helen, aided by a restorative which she was prevailed upon to swallow, Mary was sufficiently composed, at the expiration of the time mentioned, to receive her rescuers, to whom she was most anxious to express her heartfelt gratitude, a duty which, in the agitation and bewilderment of the moment, she had omitted to perform. The stranger came alone, apologizing for the absence of his wife, whose attentions were claimed by a sick child.

“ My good young lady ! ” he exclaimed, interrupting her as she was pouring forth the

most fervent acknowledgments, and invoking blessings on his head ; “ I am glad to see that you have found your tongue, and look so cheerily, and I trust that after a night’s sleep you will be as well as ever ; but, as to thanks, you owe me none, none whatever, for I should have been a brute rather than a man had I not done as much for any woman in danger and distress. It was a lucky circumstance, to be sure, that we happened to come athwart you just at that moment. We are but now arrived in England from a long voyage, and our ship was bound to Bristol ; but, as my wife is a native of Ilfracombe, and has friends in the place, she wished to be put ashore, and to remain here with the children, during my absence in London, where I have some important business to settle. If your thanks, therefore, are due to any one, which I do not admit, you must not give them to me, but to Mrs. Rudderock.”

“ Ruddock ! ” exclaimed Mary, starting, “ and just arrived from a long voyage ! Why, surely, surely you cannot ——, is your name ——.”

“ Edward Ruddock, at your service, commonly called Ned Ruddock,” said the stranger.

“ And had you an uncle formerly residing at Bristol ? ”

“ Ay, old Diedrich Hoffman called himself such, but he was little better than the hard-hearted uncle of the babes in the wood, for he cut me out of his will for marrying a pretty girl without his consent, and so I was fain to ship myself off to South America, and fight the world in the best way I could.”

“ Gracious Heaven ! ” ejaculated Mary, “ what an unexpected, what a singular encounter ! And do you come to England on account of ——, have you received my letter ? ”

“ That is rather a difficult question to

answer," said Ruddock, smiling, "since you have never told me your name."

"My name is Mary Lomax."

"Why, then, this *is* a lucky hit, indeed! something like those marvellous meetings one reads of in a romance. Yes, I did receive your letter, but it directed me to an attorney in London, for which place it was my intention to have set off to-morrow morning."

"O, Mr. Ruddock!" exclaimed Mary, whose confusion and embarrassment became evident as she spoke; "I have disclosures of the most momentous nature to make to you, but—but—." She hesitated, for she recollect ed that Helen was present, and the conflict of her emotions deprived her for the moment of the power of speech.

"I see how it is," said Ruddock. "You have a long story to tell me, but are too much flurried and surprised to set about it just now, and I don't wonder at it, for methinks you

have had enough to go through for one day. Well, leave it till to-morrow ; a few hours can't make much difference. I'll call again in the morning, and by that time I hope to find you in better trim for talking." So saying, he wished the friends good night, and took his departure.

"I perceive, by your countenance," said Mary to Helen, "how much this scene has amazed you, and I regret that I cannot gratify your curiosity. My interview to-morrow with Mr. Ruddock must be a *tête-à-tête*, for it has reference to the secret into which you are pledged not to penetrate."

"That pledge I shall never make the smallest attempt to forfeit ; and, to tell you the truth, I feel little interested in the assignation you have made, now that I find your Lothario is a married man. Lothario, however, I should not have called him, for he does not seem particularly gallant or gay, but rather a

frank, plain-spoken person, whose honesty and amiability, if I may judge by his looks and manner, may well compensate for the absence of a more polished urbanity. Be he who or what he may, his apparition appears to have quite banished the composure you were beginning to resume, and so, to cut off all further parley, I shall leave you for the present, and send Horton to assist you to bed."

On the following morning, Mary awaited the coming of Ruddock with a comparative self-possession, which, however, she found it extremely difficult to preserve when she commenced her painful and humiliating task.

She accomplished it, nevertheless ; hurrying over the narrative of her parents' crime, which, with a truly filial piety, she endeavoured to extenuate, by attributing it to a temporary alienation of mind, and concluding her recital by stating that she had practised a strict economy since her father's death, and was now

prepared, and, indeed, most anxious to make the only atonement in her power for the wrongs he had suffered, by refunding every shilling that was left to the rightful owner. Ruddock's emotions during this statement, and the vehemence of his gratitude for Mary's honourable conduct, we shall not attempt to describe.

"Well," he exclaimed, "I have often heard that a bad action entails its own punishment, and the account you give of your unhappy parents abundantly confirms the assertion ; but you little thought, I dare say, when you wrote such a pressing letter to recall me to England, that you were preparing a reward for your conscientious and upright dealing. Thus, however, by a strange combination of circumstances, has it proved ; for had I not quitted South America as soon as I received your summons, and crossed the track of your boat in the very nick of time, you might at

this moment have been tossing on the Scottish shore, at the mercy of the villain, Grimsby."

"It bears, indeed," said Mary, "the aspect of a providential intervention, for which I shall never cease to feel grateful."

"My means at present are but scanty," pursued Ruddock; "I have a growing family, and every man is entitled to his own, so I shall not hesitate to take what you seem so eager to surrender; but it must not be the whole; we will make a compromise of some sort. At all events, you must retain a comfortable independence for yourself."

"Not a guinea, not a shilling; to clear my conscience, I must completely clear my coffers. Upon this point my determination is inflexible."

"May I ask whether you have any other means of subsistence?"

"None, whatever; but that is quite immaterial: my friend, Helen, has enough for both of

us, and she has extorted from me a promise to reside with her permanently, and to share her fortune."

" You are a couple of brave, noble girls, and worthy of each other," cried Ruddock ; " and if you will allow myself and my wife, who is one of the best and most cheerful little creatures in the world, to become your neighbours, and to claim your friendship — but we will talk of that another time. I can't stop now—excuse my running away so abruptly—I must not lose a moment in telling Mrs. Ruddock of our surprising good fortune. Dear Fanny ! how delighted she will be ! And so am I, but it is more on her account, and that of the children, than my own."

" One word before you go," cried Mary. " You must solemnly promise me never to divulge, except to your wife, what has now passed between us. It is the only favour I shall ever ask of you. If possible, I would

screen the memory of my parents from shame and ignominy, while I, myself, am most anxious to avoid the disgrace of being pointed at as the daughter of a felon."

"On the honour of a man, I pledge myself to what you enjoin," said Ruddock, who then hurried off to convey to his wife the joyful tidings of their unexpected enrichment.

CHAPTER XII.

“ Ah ! what a life were this ! how sweet, how lovely !
Gives not the hawthorn-bush a sweeter shade,
Than doth a rich embroidered canopy ?

SHAKSPEARE.

DELIGHTING more and more in the society of Mary, and feeling for her a daily increasing attachment as she grew better acquainted with her amiability and her many virtues, Helen, after much persuasion, had won from her a promise that she would remain with her as her permanent companion.

Mary's frank avowal that circumstances, of which she could not explain the nature, were likely, in a short time, to leave her entirely destitute, only fortified the desire of her friend,

whose delicate and affectionate importunity it was impossible to resist.

During the past two years, each had experienced such a soothing alleviation of her sorrows, each had become so thoroughly endeared to each other, and to her present mode of life, that neither could bear the thought of a change of any sort, and still less of a separation. To secure their friendship and happiness, so far at least as the caprices of fate are susceptible of control, Helen determined never to marry, a resolution not hastily adopted only to be as lightly broken, but one to which she had been impelled by many grave considerations, and adhered to in after life with a firm consistency.

Disappointed in her first love, her heart might be said to have already tasted the sorrows of widowhood, an ordeal of which she dreaded to incur a second risk: nothing could reconcile her to the chances of being severed

from her dear Mary ; and, finally, she saw no reason whatever for tempting the malice of fortune, by exchanging a possessed and certain, for a contingent and questionable, felicity. All these motives would have operated with an equal potency on the mind of Mary, even had she not felt herself compelled to a life of celibacy by that paramount sense of honour and propriety which had enforced her to dissolve her engagement with Barlow.

“ If there be any truth in the doctrine of sympathy,” cried Helen in one of her cheerful moods, “ we were assuredly meant, dear Mary, to live and die together, for we are both love-lorn damsels, and have both determined, not however indulging in any fox-like disparagement of the unreachable grapes, to place ourselves definitively on the spinsters’ list. Well, be it so ! we will show the world that there is more enjoyment of existence, and less perversion of the feelings, in that vitupe-

rated class, than witlings and satirists are willing to allow. Here have I just been reading the tirade of a malicious scribbler, who details the progress of an old maid's embitterment at and after the following numerical fashion.

“ 1st. She professes to dislike balls, finding it difficult to get a partner.

“ 2nd. Wonders that men can leave sensible women to flirt with chits.

“ 3d. Becomes jealous of the praises of other females, and enlarges upon the misery of such of her acquaintance as are unhappily married.

“ 4th. Makes love to a young man without fortune, is unsuccessful, and rails openly against the whole sex.

“ 5th. Takes to cards and scandal, bestows her unclaimed sensibilities upon a tom-cat and a pug-dog, and exhibits a strong predilection for a methodist parson.

"Now, my dear Mary, it is very possible that the writer may have individual authority for this ill-natured portrait, or rather caricature; but that it bears the most remote resemblance to the spinster sisterhood, as a class, I do most positively deny. Nevertheless, I am not sorry that it has been drawn, for we will keep it before our eyes, that we may know what to avoid, and be enabled to make converts of all such uncharitable libellers, if they are open to conviction, by living to disprove their assertions."

Willingly pleading guilty to whatever charges may be brought against him upon critical grounds, the present writer feels some pride in recording that he has invariably spoken with a grateful and sincere reverence of the sex, as the graces and the ornaments of society—the sweeteners of existence—the depositaries, in a corrupt age, of the higher and more ennobling virtues—the exemplars, whose religion is ma-

nifested in the purity and benevolence of their lives—the redeeming portion, in short, of our common nature. Gladly and triumphantly, with these convictions upon his mind, does he adduce the instance of Helen and Mary, in additional refutation, if any such were wanting, of the trite and flippant impertinences in which male cynics and sour misogynists have sometimes thought proper to indulge. It has been said that women are incapable of a stedfast and consistent friendship. That of Helen and Mary never suffered a moment's interruption; time, which generally weakens, if it does not sever, the attachments between men, only binding them together in a closer and more delightful intimacy. That a woman cannot keep a secret is another of the received canons of the sex-traducers. Helen did more; she abstained from prying into one, although the mystery that attended her friend's rejection of Barlow, and occasioned her subsequent impoverish-

ment, were especially calculated to stimulate curiosity. She knew that there was a secret ; and, knowing also that it was of a painful nature, she refrained, with a scrupulous delicacy, from ever making the most remote allusion to the subject.

Disappointed as they both had been in their dearest hopes, neither of them were in the smallest degree irritated against the world, nor did a sullen seclusion from friendly intercourse with their neighbours form any part of the plan of their mode of life. For such a self-punishing sequestration Helen was too cheerful, Mary too judicious, both too sociable. The sphere of amiable and enlightened acquaintance in which they moved, receiving and conferring pleasure, was enlarged by an annual visit, during the winter months, to Exeter.

While adorning this extended circle, still gifted with youth and undiminished attractions, both of them received offers of marriage, which

would have been deemed much too eligible to be refused, could any considerations of a merely selfish or interested character have tempted them to break the resolution they had formed under the deliberate conviction of their judgment. From this they never swerved, not even in thought; and when years had rolled away, years of an uninterrupted friendship and happiness, such as seldom falls to the lot of mortals — when the foot of Time, however lightly he might have trodden, had stamped its impress upon their form and features, although the mind of each still retained its vernal freshness—when their bloom and beauty had faded, and they had so long been enrolled upon the list of old maids, that they were beginning to be called the old ladies, both of them were enabled to look back upon their life of “single blessedness,” not only without regret, but with the most fervent gratitude to Heaven for the lot that had been vouchsafed to them. Their

living together was attended with so many advantages as well as pleasures, that we submit to the spinster sisterhood in general the propriety of combining their resources in little households of two or more inmates, a measure which would not only give them a greater command of the comforts and luxuries of life, but would procure for them more society, protection, amusement, and independence, than can be easily attained in a separate and solitary establishment.

Not altogether useless may it be to draw attention to the example of Helen and Mary at a period when, from our habits of luxury and expense, and the circumscribed means resulting from a redundant population, the *preventive check* of Malthus is brought into active operation, at least among the middling classes, and marriage is almost confined to the upper and the lower ranks : to those who are rich enough to afford it, or so poor as

to depend upon the parish rates for its support. Between these two extremes there is a yearly increasing population of females, of whom the far greater portion must inevitably be destined to a life of celibacy ; a defect in our social system, which would be more deplorable, did it not ultimately tend to cure itself. Upon the existing generation must fall the task of enduring this acknowledged evil ; and it is therefore especially incumbent upon them, for their own sakes, to disabuse themselves and the world at large of the silly and most illiberal prejudice against old maids, an injurious and ungenerous feeling, which, having been always utterly groundless, has now become not less impolitic than hateful.

Impartial observers will generally find in this calumniated class a more kindly and generous heart, as well as more enlarged views, than are commonly encountered among the wives. And it seems natural that this should be the

case. Compelled to think and act for themselves, they become mistresses of themselves, their minds acquiring a masculine vigour and expansion from the very absence of all male support, like the ivy, which only puts forth its blossoms when it is prevented from clinging to any other body.

Married folks in England, instead of considering themselves

“ Born for the universe, narrow their mind,
And to party give up what was meant for mankind.”

Their party is the family one, or an exclusive *coterie*. Within the little circle of themselves and their acquaintance, there is doubtless to be found much domestic virtue ; but it is to be feared that a rigid scrutinizer might also occasionally discover some selfishness, some sensuality, some contraction of mind, some social intolerance. All the duties of consanguinity they discharge with an exemplary precision, but

they are too apt to forget that society at large is only another word for relationship, and that “one touch of nature makes the whole world kin.”

Old maids, on the contrary, whose affections and thoughts have never been so strictly confined within the domestic pound, are more expansive in their sensibilities—more cosmopolitan and liberal in their views—more calm and disinterested in forming their opinions. Happy the family in which a maiden aunt or sister is regularly domiciliated ! Free from the passions, and superior to the jealousies, which sometimes disturb the harmony of the best conducted household, she becomes the umpire of their little differences, the mediator between opposing parties, the restorer, by her own benign example, of all the charitable and kindly feelings ; while her clear, impartial judgment enables her to discover and to recommend whatever may best conduce to the general

welfare and prosperity. Thrice happy the family in which a monitress of this description undertakes, in addition to her other good offices, the management and incipient education of the children. With all a mother's tender vigilance, and none of her blind fondness, she equally avoids favouritism and prejudice, combining coercion with kindness—instruction with delight—and finding her appropriate reward in the proficiency and attachment of her pupils. As there are no spoilt children in such a family, there is no envy or jealousy, no heart-burning, no wrangling; and it is easily perceived by the concord and superior docility of the young folks, that they have been trained up under a more discriminating and consistent tuition than is usually exercised by parents.

Ruddock settled in the immediate neighbourhood of Ilfracombe, where he purchased a handsome mansion, with extensive gardens,

in one of the most romantic situations of that picturesque district. That his house was the home of Helen and her friend, whenever they chose to render it such, it is scarcely necessary to state ; nor need we add that his ardent gratitude, his cheerfulness, and his intelligence, rendered him at all times a most acceptable companion to his visitants.

Other and more powerful attractions drew them frequently to his residence, for they did not number, in the wide circle of their acquaintance, a more friendly or fascinating person than Mrs. Ruddock. Originally an actress in a small provincial theatre, she added one more honourable example to the exceptionless list of those female performers, who having, in our own times, been raised by marriage into a higher sphere, have engrafted, upon the graces and endowments requisite for success in their first most arduous profession, all the proprieties and virtues that can adorn

private life, or shed an additional dignity upon exalted station.

Their children, at once the playfellows and the pupils of Helen and Mary, who found a singular delight in thus blending tuition with gambols and caresses, offered a striking illustration of what we have just stated as to the advantage of having their earlier education superintended by a friendly old maid.

From Hunter and Rose, with whom the friends at Ilfracombe maintained an active and uninterrupted correspondence, they continued to receive accounts of the most gratifying description. Abundantly, indeed, had the former justified the favourable and confident predictions of his wife. Corrected and banished for ever were all the little infirmities of temper, speculative tendencies, and peccadilloes in conduct, which had sprung from an uncongenial position, and an impatient sense of degradation, so that he might now fairly be cited as

one of the most exemplary, as well as the happiest, of husbands.

Nor did marriage and independence operate with a less beneficial effect upon Rose, whose morbid nervousness and timidity gradually subsided into the calm self-possession which was alone wanting to give full development to her genius and a consistent fascination to her manners. Besides assisting her husband in his literary undertakings, which he pursued with unabated ardour and success, she became a regular poetical contributor to several of the periodical publications, acquiring a merited reputation as a writer, while she felt an honest pride, in thus adding to their finances.

Although their cottage-door was opened by a “neat-handed Phillis,” instead of a liveried footman, the most enlightened of the titled and the great, residing in the neighbourhood, a class which, in England, seldom fails to honour itself by honouring talents and virtue,

became their frequent visitants, attracted not less by the beautiful drawings and the general taste conspicuous in their residence, than by the genius and affability of its occupants.

Jasper Pike, after being rejected by several females, whose fortunes had tempted him to make them an offer, was decoyed into marriage with a woman of doubtful reputation, who had reported herself to be an heiress ; but whose property, on investigation, proved to be very insignificant.

On making this discovery, he would have receded from his engagement, had not a moustached relation of the lady proposed an alternative which determined the pusillanimous suitor to take the lady by the hand, rather than a pistol. His cupidity having tempted him to embark at that juncture in an extensive speculation, which ultimately threatened to be attended with an almost ruinous loss, he formed the dishonourable re-

solution of securing the bulk of his fortune by settling it on his wife.

For this purpose trustees were to be named, but where to find them he knew not, for he had no friends, and not even an acquaintance from whom he was entitled to ask a favour of any kind. All through life it had been his great object to avoid the performance of the smallest social duty. Responsibilities, liabilities, or trouble on account of others, he had ever held in special abhorrence. *He* had never been trustee, or executor, or assignee ; nay, he had repeatedly refused to witness a simple signature, lest it should expose him, at some future period, to some possible inconvenience. These selfish and cowardly evasions he called knowing the world ; and he now found, by their declining to accede to his requests, that the world knew him.

From motives of shabby economy, he employed a pettifogging attorney, who recom-

mended as trustees two clients of a smug puritanical aspect that seemed to warrant their respectability. By some trickery never fully explained, these demure worthies contrived, about a month after the marriage, to sell out the stock which had been transferred into their names, and to decamp with the money.

About the same time, Pike was compelled to part with the whole remainder of his fortune to make good the losses on his speculation; so that he was left, as the result of all his contemptible selfishness, manœuvring, and finessing, to begin his career afresh at an advanced age, with a termagant wife, impaired health and spirits, and not a single friend to assist him in his struggles.

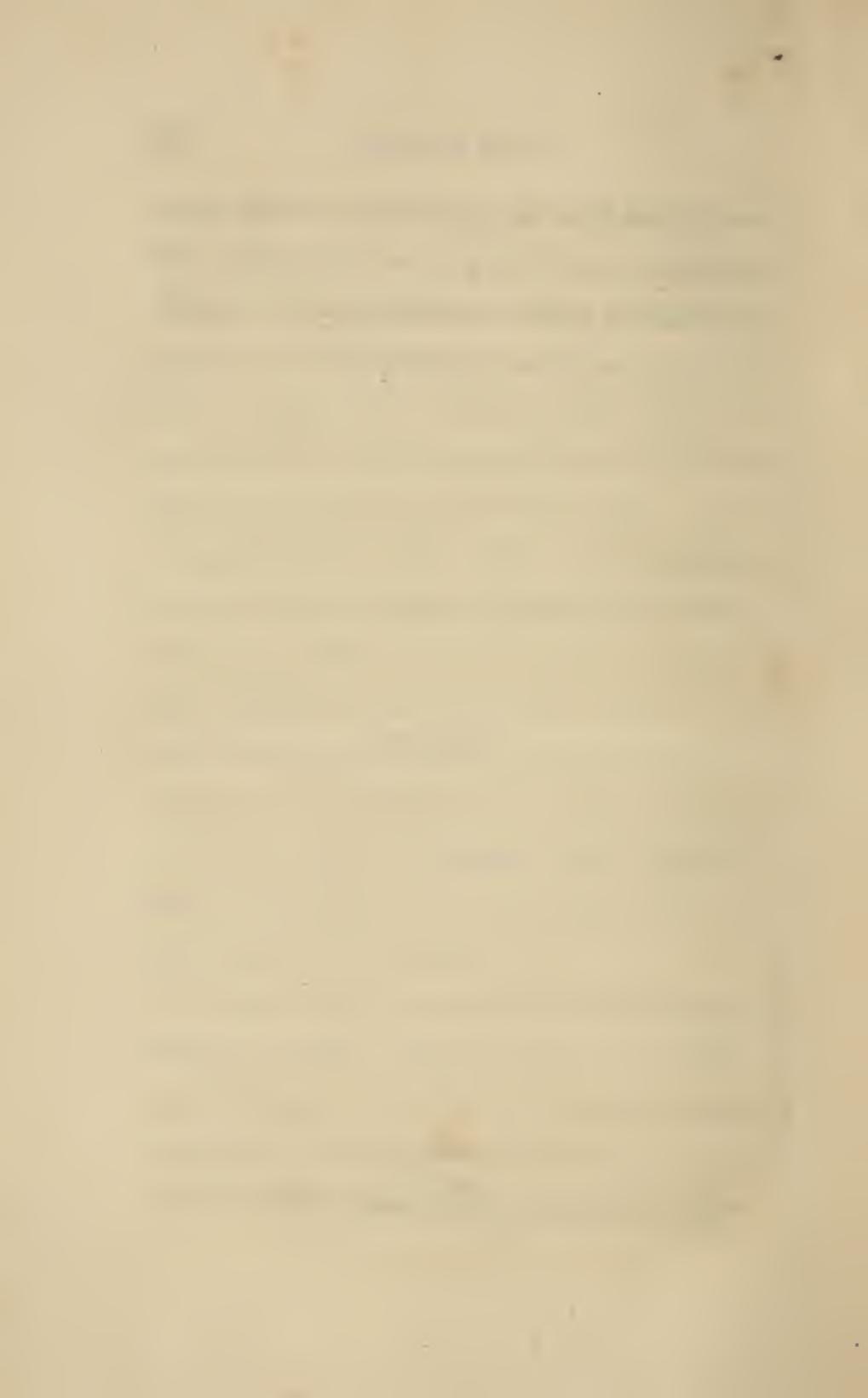
As every vice is an error in calculation as well as in morals, Pike was destined to afford another signal proof that “honesty is the best policy;” that a sordid, heartless, hateful egotism only returns “to plague the inven-

tor ;" and that we cannot more surely serve ourselves than when, by serving others, we confirm the poet's assertion that " true self-love and social are the same."

THE END.

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